

Shavuot for Families:

50 Pages of Background, Stories, Games

Edited by Barry Dov Lerner

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Shalom and thanks . . .

Much of the following material is taken from *Shavuot Sheaves*, a work published in 1953 by the Youth Department, Head Office, Jewish National Fund, Jerusalem, Israel, Ahva Press. The Jewish National Fund office has given permission to share this early edition with you for Shavuot as "Jewish Freeware." Yehuda Haezrahi edited *Shavuot Sheaves*, and the title pages indicate that it is or was intended to be part of a larger JNF Festival Series; unfortunately I only was able to find this book. The original grammar, spelling, presentation and transliteration has been retained, and I know that you will find as did I wonderful nuggets of phrase and translation in this recovered publication.

We should all be grateful for their encouragement and support which reaches us from "Eretz Yisrael," the land of Israel, and also from "Am Yisrael," the People Israel, the early fruits of a young Jewish State. Today, some 50 years later, parallel to the 50 days between Pesach and Shavuot, we are grateful, celebrating not only the agricultural first-fruits of Israel praised internationally, recalling our historical tradition of Sinai today through our study of Torah, but also through re-issuing some of these wonderful words and stories. For that reason you have 50 pages in this issue for Shavuot.

How can we, each of us, respond to this wonderful gift from the Jewish National Fund? Share them with your family and friends. Read the stories with your family on the eve of Shavuot (or beforehand). Plant a tree in Israel, and then - go to Israel at least once a year to water it! And take your family with you! ☺

May this Shavuot be a fulfilling **Festival Of Weeks** (*Exodus 34:22*), **Festival Of Reaping** (*Exodus 24:16*), **A Time Of First-Fruits** (*Numbers 28:26*), **The Finale To The Sefira** (*TB Rosh HaShana*) and **The Season Of The Giving Of The Torah** (*from the Festival liturgy*) for you, your family and your community.

Barry Dou Lerner

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SHAVUOT AND ITS MEANING

THE PILGRIM FESTIVALS

THREE times a year, on Pesach, Shavuot and Succot, the people of Israel in Biblical times made joyful pilgrimage from all over the country to Jerusalem. These Festivals were called “Shalosh Regalim” - literally “The Three Times” and the pilgrimage was known as “Aliyah L’Regel.” Even as all the rivers go down to the sea, says the Talmud, and yet the sea is not full, so does all Israel stream to Jerusalem on the Pilgrim Festivals, and yet Jerusalem is not full.

Great merit and great power were ascribed to these journeys. Elkanah, the father of Samuel, it was said, was granted the unique privilege of becoming the father of the great prophet, because he set an example to all Israel, by regularly making the pilgrimage to, Shilo before the Temple was built. It was believed that a man could leave his house and all his possessions behind him in perfect confidence. The Talmud tells how one man forgot to lock his house when he set off for Jerusalem, and on his return found a serpent guarding the door. In Ashkelon there were two rich brothers who lived among neighbours who planned to rob their houses when they went away. But God sent angels in the shapes of the brothers who deceived the neighbours into thinking that they were still at home.

No matter how many people crowded into Jerusalem there was always room for them. When the city was short of water because of the multitudes of pilgrims, it was said that Nakdemon Ben Gurion, famed for his riches, borrowed the contents of twelve wells from a rich neighbour on the undertaking that the rain would fill them again. And, miraculously, rain fell at the proper time to enable the promise to be fulfilled.

The principal duty laid down for these days was the duty of joy. A man must not only rejoice himself, but bring joy to his family and also to the poor and the stranger. This Festival joy was to unite the whole nation, without distinction, men and women, rich and poor, ignorant and learned. One half of the day, according to one authority, was to be devoted to study, and the other half to eating, drinking and rejoicing.

BETWEEN PESACH AND SHAVUOT

No sooner has the Festival of Pesach got properly under way than we begin to look forward to Shavuot. On the second day of Pesach we begin to count the forty-nine days which separate the two Festivals. (This is called “Sefirat Ha-Omer” - “The Counting of the Omer” - because, on the day when the counting begins, a measure called an “omer” of the new season's barley was brought as a thanks-offering to the Temple in Biblical days).

Day after day, through the second half of the month of Nisan, through the month of Iyar, up to the fifth of Sivan, the counting goes on according to the Biblical injunction: “Today is the first day of Omer... today is the second day of the Omer ...and so on, day by day

and week by week.” So, in this vivid and dramatic fashion, we feel the Festival coming nearer and nearer.

It is no mere accident that connects together so intimately these two great occasions in the Jewish year - the connection is profound and many-sided. First, they are both great nature Festivals, and the counting helps to emphasize the continuity of Nature. Pesach is the Festival of spring, of the revival of Nature from its winter sleep and the beginning of new growth in the flowers and crops. Shavuot is the Festival of summer, when the crops are being gathered and the fruit begins to ripen. Secondly, Pesach is the “Season of our Freedom,” while Shavuot is the “Season of the Giving of our Law,” commemorating the occasion when the people willingly limited its freedom by accepting the obligations of the Torah. The liberation of Israel from bondage in Egypt was more than an end in itself - it was a means to the establishment of a society, based on righteousness and social justice. So, Shavuot stands for the culmination of the process which the Departure from Egypt began.

This is brought out with particular clarity in the formula recited by the farmer when he laid the first-ripe fruits on the altar:

“My father was a wandering Aramean
And he went down to Egypt
And sojourned there....
And the Lord brought us out from Egypt
With a mighty hand and: with an outstretched arm.”

Just as on Pesach, we look forward to Shavuot, so on Shavuot we recall to mind the great redemption which is commemorated, by Pesach.

THE ANXIOUS DAYS

This period has its own particular atmosphere and customs. From ancient days it has been observed as a time of semi-mourning. Neither weddings nor any other festivities are celebrated, and there is a certain melancholy in the air. This may be partly due to the general feeling of expectancy and solemnity, natural in a period when the Israelites in the wilderness were waiting for the momentous day when God would reveal himself to them on Mount Sinai and give them the Torah.

There may be here, also, some reflection of the feelings of the farmer at this season. Between the sowing and the harvest his heart is full of care and anxiety. Many are the enemies that may damage the crops; hot winds, field mice, locusts and other insects may bring to naught all his labour. And so the farmer has no patience for lightheartedness and merry-making till the days of suspense are over and the harvest is safely gathered in. But tradition ascribes the mourning during the “Sefirah” to historical causes. The Talmud says that the great Rabbi Akiva had 24,000 pupils, and that they all died of the plague between Pesach and Shavuot. Rabbi Akiva was not only one of the greatest scholars of the Mishna -he was also known as one of the principal supporters of Bar Cochba, whose

revolt against Roman oppression in the second century is one of the most heroic episodes in our history. It may well be that we have here a hidden reference to the desperate struggle in which the flower of Israel's youth died for freedom.

Further reasons for mourning occurred in the Middle Ages - the massacres of Jews during the First Crusade in 1096, and during the Cossack Rising of Chmielnitzki in 1648. There is only one day, the 33rd day of the Sefirah (called Lag Ba'omer because, according to the Hebrew system of indicating numbers by letters, Lamed stands for thirty and Gimmel for three) that is an exception to the general mourning, because, tradition explains, the plague among Rabbi Akiva's pupils ceased on that day, a belief which is probably founded on a victory on that day for Bar Cochba's army.

PROLOGUE TO SHAVUOT

From the beginning of the month of Sivan the holiday period begins. The semi-mourning of Sefirah is over, and weddings may be celebrated. The first day, Rosh Chodesh, is a minor Festival like the beginning of every Hebrew month. The second day is called "Hayom HaM'yuchas," – "The Privileged Day", because, it is said, on that day the Jewish people were told that they were to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy people", and because the Day of Atonement always falls on the same day of the week.

The 3rd, 4th, and 5th days are called "Sh'loshet Y'mei Hagbalah," - "The Three Days of Restriction", for on those days a boundary was placed round Mount Sinai which no Israelite was to overstep on pain of death. During these days the People were told to prepare themselves for the great occasion when God would reveal himself to them. The night of Shavuot is one of the most solemn occasions in the Jewish year for orthodox Jews. The whole night is spent in the Synagogue preparing for the Day of Revelation. Children believe that if they can stay up till midnight and keep awake, the heavens will open for an instant and all the wishes of their hearts will be fulfilled, if they make their wish at exactly the correct moment. A special service is recited, called "Tikkun Chatzot," – "The Midnight Service," or "Tikkun Leyl Shavuot," – "The Shavuot Night Service," which is a sort of summary of the whole of the written and oral law, Chumash, Prophets and Writings, Mishna, Talmud and "Zohar." The beginning and end of each section are read, and there is also a Special version of the 613 Commandments called "Azharot," - "Warnings" or "Injunctions".

It is told that a famous preacher of the "Chassidim, called the Maggid from Dubnow, was spending the Festival as a guest of the great scholar Rabbi Elijah of Vilna, known as the Gaon ("Genius") of Vilna; The host noticed that the Maggid was simply studying the section of the Mishna dealing with the laws of the Festival instead of saying the "Tikkun", and politely, asked him the reason. "Rabbi", was the answer, "when I travel about the country-side I see in the shops of the merchants samples of the various types of goods they have to sell, and I know that if I want to buy anything there are ample stocks available in the merchants' stores. So it is with you. For you it is sufficient to repeat the 'samples' of the written and oral law contained in the "Tikkun" because I know that all

tile treasures of the Law are at your disposal. But in the case of one like myself, whose scholarship cannot compare with yours, it would be nothing but deceit for me to spread out my 'samples, which are valueless since I do not possess the 'stocks'."

Among the Jewish mystics the "Tikkun" had an even deeper significance. The Torah was compared to the bride and Israel to the bride-groom; and the survey of the main features of the Torah was like the ceremony of adorning the bride in all her jewels and ornaments, so that in this way the sons of men could become, as it were, partners in the great act of Revelation, and help by their efforts in the coming of the Torah.

One such night of study and prayer over four hundred years ago introduces us to two great men whose love for the Land of Israel led them to settle there, in spite of the difficulties of the enterprise, Rabbi Joseph Caro, later famous as the author of the Shulchan Aruch, the great compendium of Jewish Law, felt for many years deep promptings to settle in the Holy Land, for only there he believed, would he attain perfect communion with God. He discussed his plans with others of like mind, and especially with his friend, the poet and mystic, Rabbi Shlomoh Alkabetz, author of the famous Sabbath hymn, "Lecha Dodi," who also felt the sorrow and bitterness of Exile, and the aspiration for a better life for Israel. "Too long have you dwelt in the Valley of Weeping," Alkabetz had cried out to the people of Zion in his great hymn, "Arise and go forth out of the midst of the desolation!"

Finally Caro set off on the long journey, and stopped on the way in Salonika to spend the Festival of Shavuot, with Alkabetz. The latter describes how they spent the night of the "Tikkun" together with other scholars and students. First they studied the Torah, and then the Mishna - and then Rabbi Joseph Caro began to speak to them in a voice of wonderful strength and sweetness. They felt as if it were not simply a man who was speaking to them, but the Mishna itself; finding utterance through a human voice. And the Rabbi explained to his awe-struck hearers the need to arise and go up to the Land of Israel, and urged them not to delay, but to set off at once. "For behold," said he, "the day will come when Man will put away the Idol of Money and Wealth and the Enjoyment of the World, the Idol of Gold, the lust for property, and will go up to the Land of Israel."

The words entered deep into their hearts, and immediately after the Festival Rabbi Joseph Caro, Rabbi Shlomoh Alkabetz and a large company of followers set out for Eretz Israel. They settled in Safad, which became a centre of Jewish settlement and learning for centuries.

THE NAMES OF THE FESTIVAL AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

On the 6th and the 7th of Sivan (in Eretz Israel on the 6th only) the Festival itself is celebrated. Let us look first of all at its names, for these of course, will provide a clue to the various types of significance associated with it.

THE FESTIVAL OF WEEKS

Seven weeks are counted from the second day of Pesach up to and including the day before the Festival. The fiftieth day is Shavuot. (The English name PENTECOST, derived from the Greek; also refers to this feature.)

THE FESTIVAL OF THE HARVEST

On Shavuot Eretz Israeli celebrates the end of the wheat harvest, and so great has been the love of the Jewish people for Eretz Israel throughout the ages and in all countries to which Jews have been dispersed that they have continued to celebrate the harvest Festival at this time although most of them lived in towns and had no harvest of their own to celebrate.

To mark the occasion, and to show their gratitude to God for the success of the harvest, the Israelites in Biblical times used to bring to the Temple two loaves baked from the newly-gathered wheat. The Omer consisted of grain, to mark the beginning of the harvest season—the two loaves, the final form in which the wheat was consumed, marked its conclusion.

THE FESTIVAL OF THE FIRST-RIPE FRUITS

Besides being the end of the harvest of the grain, Shavuot is also the beginning of the fruit season. On this day, says the Talmud, judgment is pronounced on the fruit, whether it will ripen well or whether the crop will fail. For this reason offerings were brought to the Temple of the fruit which had just begun to ripen.

This is a joyous ceremony. Before the Festival the farmer would go round his vines and his fruit-trees, and tie a thread round any fig, pomegranate or bunch of grapes which had begun to ripen. Then the villagers would assemble in the small towns which formed the centers for the various districts, and spend the night in the streets - no hard-ship in the warm summer of Eretz Israel. Early in the morning the leader would go round, calling, "Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the House of the Lord our God!"

It was a merry and colourful procession. At the head of the cavalcade was an ox, crowned with a wreath of olive leaves, with his horns painted with gold. Their progress was accompanied by the joyful notes of the flute, to lighten their hearts and while away the time. When they drew near to Jerusalem, they would stop to decorate their offerings and send someone ahead to notify their coming. Then the representatives of the priests and the Levites and the officials would come out to welcome them, and villagers and

Jerusalemites would enter the city together. The artisans and craftsmen of Jerusalem would line the streets as they passed, and cry, “Welcome, brothers, men of . . .” (mentioning the name of the place from which the pilgrims had come).

Thus they would make their way to the Temple, carrying their baskets full of fruit and other produce, with the flute still playing before them. The rich brought their gifts in baskets of gold and silver and the poor in baskets plaited from willow branches, but even the king himself carried his basket on his shoulder into the Temple like the rest of the people. There each man presented his offering before the priests.

THE SOLEMN ASSEMBLY

This is a Talmudic name for the Festival, referring to the gathering of the people to mark the solemnity of the occasion of the Giving of the Torah. Perhaps there is also a reference to the great historic assembly of all Israel before Mount Sinai.

THE SEASON OF THE GIVING OF OUR TORAH

The Bible tells how on this day God revealed himself to all Israel. For three days beforehand they prepared and purified themselves, and then Moses brought them to the foot of Mount Sinai. The mountain was covered with smoke, and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace. And God uttered the “Aseret HaDibrot,” - the “Ten Commandments,” which contain the basis, of the whole of the moral law of humanity, as well as of the Covenant between God and the people-of Israel. And the people accepted the burden of the Torah eagerly and willingly: “Na’asehV’Nishmah,” – “We will do and we will hear!”

On that day, according to tradition, Israel accepted, not only the Ten Commandments but all the laws of the Torah and all the traditions and explanations which were afterwards expounded by the Sages of the Mishna and the Gemara and which were called the “Torah SheBa’al Peh,” – “The Oral Law.”

DECORATING THE SYNAGOGUE

It is an ancient custom to decorate the floors' and the walls of the synagogue with fragrant green leaves and branches. Special care is taken to decorate the bimah, the platform on which the Torah is read, and the Aron, in which the Torah is kept. Sometimes the Sifrei Torah, the Scrolls, are adorned with garlands of flowers, and in some places it was the custom to present each member of the congregation with a flower or a leafy twig. Often large branches, almost like complete trees, or small trees in pots, are stood in the corners. On the eve of the Festival the children would go out to the woods to collect the materials, and in certain places the girls would cut flowers out of paper or hang up egg-shells filled with feathers.

An obvious reason for this beautiful custom is that it brings home to everyone, even in the Diaspora, the character of Shavuot as a harvest Festival. There may be, also, an attempt to create an out-of-doors atmosphere, in order to recall the assembly of the people in the open before Mount Sinai. It is appropriate, besides, in view of the belief that Shavuot is the Judgment Day for the fruit of the trees, and the baskets of Bikkurim, or first-ripe fruits, were adorned with flowers and twigs. Another reason may be found in the Talmudic saying that "With every single commandment that came out of the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed be He, the whole world was filled with perfume." It is said that it was Shavuot when Moses was found as a baby in the bull rushes by the banks of the Nile, and that is another scene which we may recall when we see the synagogue in all the glory of its Festival garb of green.

Whatever may be the first and original reason for the custom, there can be no doubt of one thing: it is observances like these that have kept alive and fresh in the Jewish heart among the often dark and squalid surroundings of the ghetto and the town the memory of the Land of Israel, the "land flowing with milk and honey."

SYNAGOGUE READINGS

A unique feature of the Synagogue services on Shavuot is the chanting of a special hymn, called " Akdamot", after the Sifrei Torah have been brought out. It tells the glory of God and Israel's devotion in spite of persecution and temptation, and is written in Aramaic, the language of the Gemara. Like the Sabbath hymn, "Lecha Dodi," it reveals the name of its author, for the first letters of the lines spell out, first a double alphabet, and then the name of Meir Ben Yitzchak, who lived in the 11th century, and who was the teacher of the famous Rashi. The highlight of the Torah reading, however, is the reading of the Ten Commandments, in which each congregation repeats, as it were, the acceptance of the Torah which first took place in front of Mount Sinai.

THE BOOK OF RUTH

We also read on Shavuot one of the "Five Megillot" or Scrolls - the Book of Ruth. This book, one of the most charming in the Bible, is perfectly suited in its atmosphere of combined seriousness and joy, of human suffering and idyllic life in the countryside, to this Festival of harvest and Law-Giving. Its central episode takes place at the time of the harvest, and its heroine is a non-Jewish maiden who personally accepts the burdens of joining the People of Israel, thereby accepting also the Torah of Israel. Perhaps one of the best of the reasons for reading it is that given by one of the medieval commentators: "Because the Scroll of Ruth is full of loving-kindness, and the Torah is full of loving-kindness."

KING DAVID AND SHAVUOT

According to tradition, David, King of Israel, was born and also died on Shavuot. David was, of course, the greatest of the descendants of Ruth, and this is another reason why the Book of Ruth is read on this Festival.

It is still the custom in Jerusalem to make a pilgrimage on Shavuot to the spot on Mount Zion which is reputed to be David's tomb. The tradition dates back to the 12th century, and its origin is described by Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela. He tells how some workmen, engaged in repairing the Franciscan Church at this place, came by chance on a cave which contained the tombs of David, Solomon and all the kings of Judah, adorned with gold and silver. When they wished to enter, a mighty storm blew them to the ground, and a voice cried out, "Arise and leave this place!"

Today this cave, like the rest of Mount Zion, is under the care of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the State of Israel. It is one of the few traditional holy places in that part of Jerusalem which is in Jewish hands, and has therefore acquired even more importance than it had before.

SHAVUOT FOODS

As on other Festivals, so on Shavuot the spiritual meaning of the occasion does not prevent food from playing an important part, in the customs connected with the day. It is customary to have one meal composed entirely of milk foods, prominent among which are three-cornered-cakes called "kreplach." Various reasons are given for this custom.

The Torah is compared to "honey and milk" (the phrase "honey and milk is under your tongue," in the Song of Songs, is interpreted to apply to the Torah), and of course the Land of Israel is "flowing with milk and honey." Then there is a verse in the Book of Numbers, which begins, "And on the day of the first-ripe fruits, when you offer up an offering..." and the next three words are "**Chadasha LaShem B'Shavuoteichem**" the initials of which spell out "Chalav" - milk.

A special long loaf is baked, with four tips, in reference to the four methods by which the Torah may be studied: "P'shat" - the simple and straight-forward interpretation; "Remez" - the interpretation by means of the hints contained in the text; "D'rash" - the moral lessons which may be derived from the text; and "Sod" - the hidden, mystical meaning concealed in the sacred words.

In North Africa, a traveller tells of a Shavuot cake which is quite out of the ordinary. It is called "Siete Cielos" (The Seven Heavens), "referring to the seven heavens which Moses had to pass through in order to receive the Torah. It is made in the form of seven concentric circles, one on top of the other, each smaller than the one beneath, and it is adorned with a host of symbols: a ladder for Moses to climb; his staff; a model of Mount Sinai; the ark in which the Tables of the Law were laid and the Tables themselves; the quail which the children of Israel ate in the Wilderness; the brazen serpent which Moses set up to hear the people; etc. You can imagine the delight of the children at the sight of

this masterpiece, and still more the delight of eating it, after taking a good look at all the decorations.

FIRST DAY OF STUDY

It is only appropriate that children should start the study of the Torah on the anniversary of the day on which it was given, and it is also appropriate that on the Festival of the First-ripe Fruits, the father should present the newly ripe fruit of the family, the child who is now ready to begin his studies.

So, on Shavuot the child was washed, had his hair trimmed, was dressed in new clothes, and was carried by his father to the “Bet HaMidrash” - the House of Study. There the Rabbi would bring a small board with all the letters of the Alef--Bet written on it; he would all out the letters one by one, and the child would repeat them after him. Then, he would smear the board with honey and make the child lick it, after which he would be given sweet cakes, called “Mount Sinai Cakes” on which there was written the verse, “The Law that Moses commanded us - an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob.” This verse also the new scholar would repeat after the Rabbi, and he would be told that the Torah is as sweet as honey and cake. When the child went home he would repeat what he had learned to his admiring family, and receive presents from all his friends and relations. Lastly, he would be stood on a table, while an older boy would stand on a chair and fire de question after another at him in order to fix everything firmly in is mind. It would be a long time before a child would forget a beginning like that to his school-days - our forefathers had quite a good idea of child psychology.

THE BATTLE OF SHAVUOT

Lastly, here is an old custom described by a nineteenth century traveller, Israel Joseph Benjamin, who called himself Benjamin II (the first was Benjamin of Tudela, whose journeys took place in the 12th century). He tells how in Elkush, Armenia, he found an ancient, ruined synagogue, near which there was a platform adorned with gold and silver, reputed to be the grave of a prophet called Nachum Elkushi. From all around the Jews came to this spot with Sifrei Torah on Shavuot, and marched around the tomb seven times, singing. All night they studied, and when morning came all the men girded on weapons and went to near-by hill. The most respected citizens carried the sacred scrolls to the top, and the reader would read from the Torah, while the people stood below, like the :Israelites of old. After the reading they divided into two “armies” and had a mock battle; then they marched home singing and shouting to be welcomed by their wives with songs and dances. In this way they would prepare for the battles which they believed would be fought for the Land of Israel in the days of the Messiah.

CONCLUSION

We have given here only a few of the observances and customs of the Festival of Shavuot, a Festival which combines in one harmonious whole elements which might seem to be incompatible; spirituality and earthiness; Law and Nature; the Divine and the Human; a Festival whose heights reach, like Jacob's ladder, to the heavens, but whose feet are planted firmly in the good earth of the Land of Israel.

Misha Louvish

TALES OF SHAVUOT: TORAH IS FOR MAN

Our teacher Moses heard the voice of God calling to him to come up to Heaven and receive the Torah for the Children of Man. Moses went up to Heaven as God had bidden him to do.

As soon as the angels saw the man Moses come up to Heaven, they gathered round the heavenly throne. They appeared to be in distress. One of the angels spoke for all the others saying, “O Lord God, what is this man of Earth, this Moses, doing in Heaven, in our domain? Why has he come?”

The Lord God answered and said to them, “He has come up to Heaven to receive the Torah for the Children of Man on Earth.”

The angels were still troubled. A second angel addressed the Lord, saying, “Our God, You cannot be serious about this! Will You give so precious a treasure to the Children of Man? Are they worthy of it? Few have been the men who have not sinned in their lifetime. Will they, can they, lived up to what is written in the Torah?”

God turned to Moses and said to him, “Speak to the angels, Moses. Answer the questions they ask. Tell them what the Children of Man on Earth need.” Moses said, “I am but a human being. I fear that I am not able to speak to this heavenly assembly.”

God saw that Moses was really afraid to speak up and said to him, “Moses, take hold of the throne, the heavenly throne. Hold it fast and it will give you courage. Then speak to the angels. They will listen.”

Moses took hold of the heavenly throne. Indeed, this gave him the courage he needed to face the angels and speak for Man. He then turned to the Lord and asked, “O Lord God, what are the most important words written in the Torah?” God said to Moses, “The Ten Commandments are the most important laws written for the welfare of Man. The first commandment says, ‘I am the Lord, your God, Who took you out of the Land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.’”

Moses then spoke to the angels saying, “You are the angels who dwell in Heaven. Have you been slaves in Egypt? No! Children of Men on Earth were slaves in Egypt. The Torah is for them.” The angels could not argue against this for, indeed, there were no slaves among them.

“What else is written in the Torah?” Moses asked. God said, “You shall have no gods besides Me.”

Moses spoke to the angels, “You angels know that thee One God -in all the universe. On Earth there are those who worship idols made of wood or clay; of gold or of copper. They must learn to be faithful to One God only. For them is the Torah.”

“What else is written in the commandments?” asked Moses. “Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.” Moses said, “You, angels do not labor in Heaven. For you every

day is the Sabbath day. Many of the Children of Man still have to learn that they must rest at least one day in seven they will become slaves again. No, not for the angels the Torah written.”

God said, “In the Torah it is written, ‘Honor your father and your mother!’” Again Moses addressed the heavenly host, saying, “You have no mother or father to honor. On earth men must learn to honor the mother and father else they would neglect them in old age.”

The angels stood mute around the heavenly throne while Moses continued speaking to them as he heard God utter the commandments one after the other, “Do not kill; do not steal; lived a clean family life; do not covet.”

“Angels do not kill,” said Moses. “Angels do not steal. Angels do not wish for things that belong to others. On Earth there are sons and daughters who do all these things. It is for them that the Torah with its commandments is written. It is for them that God wishes to send this precious treasure that they may study it, and learn from it, and live according to it. Should they do so they may become ‘Little lower than the angels.’”

Moses spoke these words, then remained silent. All remained silent round the heavenly throne. At last one of the angels spoke up and said, “Go Moses, take this Torah to the sons and daughters of Man on Earth and may God's blessing go with you.” Then Moses took his hand from the throne and received the Torah. He descended to Earth bearing Man's greatest treasure.

WHO WILL BE MY GUARANTOR?

Seymour Rossel

When Moses went up on Mt. Sinai to speak with the Lord, the people of Israel waited below for him to return.

The Israelites were very anxious. They wondered what the Lord would say to Moses. When they saw Moses coming down the mountain. They turned to him eagerly and, as they looked at his face, they saw that he was sad.

“What has happened?” they asked him.

Moses spoke to them and said, “The Lord wishes to give us a most wonderful gift, a precious thing.”

Excitedly, the people asked, “What is this gift?”

“It is called the Torah,” Moses said. “In the Torah there are stories which teach us how God wishes us to lived.”

“There are laws in it also, laws which teach us how to lived peacefully with our neighbors so that a man will love his fellowmen. The Torah will teach us how to lived as free men, so that we will never have to be slaves again.”

The people remembered Egyptian bondage under Pharaoh. They did not wish to be slaves again. They wanted to be free. They wished to live in peace. Truly, they thought, God's Torah is a great gift.

But Moses was still sad.

“Why are you unhappy, Moses?” the people asked.

Moses sat upon a rock at the foot of the mountain. “God will not give us this gift of Torah unless we promise Him something in return. We must offer Him a “guarantee.”

Then the people too were sad. “What have we to offer in exchange for such precious gift?” one man asked another.” A gift like this is worth empires, and we are a poor people in the desert. Now we will never have the gift of Torah.”

But the women of Israel came to Moses and said, “We have bracelets with rubies and rings with diamonds. We have precious necklaces and pins. We will give them all to the Lord in exchange for the Torah.”

So Moses went up the mountain again and spoke with the Lord. But when he returned, he was still sad.

He told the people, “The Lord has said that His Torah is more precious than all the rubies and diamonds in the world. The Torah is so bright that it will light the souls of men. Not even a thousand diamonds can do that!”

Then the people sat on the sand of the desert and thought.

All night long the people thought, and when the sun came up they had an idea. “We will offer the Lord our great leaders, Moses and Aaron, as a guarantee for the Torah. Surely the Lord will accept the loyalty of Moses and Aaron in exchange for His wonderful gift.”

So Moses went up Mt. Sinai to the Lord again. But again he was sad when he returned.

“The Lord has spoken and told me that He cannot accept Moses and Aaron as guarantee. They are already His; they have already pledged their loyalty to the Lord.”

Now in the camp of the Israelites there was an old man whose wisdom was great. When this wise man heard Moses’ words, he rose and spoke to the people.

“God has offered us His most precious possession, the Torah. Now we must offer God our most precious possession. If a man could choose only one thing in all the world to be his own, would he choose precious jewels? No. Would he choose an honored leader? No. Would he choose money? No. What would he choose if he had only one choice? – his children!”

Then the people turned to Moses. “Yes!” they cried out. “We will offer children as a guarantee for the Torah. If God will give us His Torah, we will teach it faithfully to our children. And our children will teach it to their children. What could be a better guarantee?”

So Moses went up the mountain again to speak with the Lord. And when he came down, he was carrying the tablets of the Law, the Torah which God had given him.

Moses stood before all the people of Israel and said: “The Lord has given us the Torah. Our children will be His guarantee. For the Lord has said that all men are His children, and the children of all men are precious to Him.” Then the people of Israel thanked the Lord by studying His Torah, and they have kept their promise by teaching the Torah to their children from that day until this.

NOT A BIRD TWITTERED

(This story is based on the Talmudic legend which tells how, when God gave the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai, “not a bird twittered.”)

I.

In the wilderness near Mount Sinai, Moses pastured the flock.

One day Moses saw a burning bush, and a bird had spread its wings and was hovering above the bush, twittering sadly.

Said Moses: “Let me go up and see what has happened to the bird.” So Moses ran to the burning bush and saw among its branches a bird's nest, and young nestlings stretching out their heads beyond the nest, chirping ceaselessly.

Moses made haste, thrust his hand among the branches of the bush, and drew out nest and birds together. Nor did Moses pay heed to his hand, which was scorched by fire and pierced by thorns, and he went and placed the nest among the branches of another bush.

The mother-bird flew after Moses, hovered about his head, waited until the placing of the nest was completed, and, chirping loudly, quickly entered the nest. While he was binding up his hand, the mother-bird came and perched herself on his palm, chirping and touching his lips with her bill. Moses understood that she was kissing him and thanking him for rescuing her nestlings and her nest. Moses kissed her and freed her in the air.

The bird flew away. But from that day on she became attached to Moses and visited him together with her fledglings, who had already learned to fly. They chirped and twittered to him, and Moses chirped and twittered to them, until he had learned the language of the birds.

When word reached the birds in the land round about of Moses' deed, and how he understood the language of the birds, many of them left their nests and their homes and came to see Moses, and nested on all the bushes and on the ground. And the desolate wilderness was filled with joyful chirping.

II.

One day Moses again saw a burning bush.

And when he turned to see it, a voice was heard calling to him from the bush.

“Moses, Moses! I saw you take the nestlings out of the fire -go now to Pharaoh and take the children of Israel out of Egypt! “

So Moses left the wilderness, the flocks, and the birds, and went to Pharaoh.

And when he took the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, he led them through the wilderness to Mount Sinai.

The birds saw the children of Israel coming and welcomed them with song and joy. But one of the children of Israel saw a bird's nest with the mother sitting on the young, and he took the mother with the young . . .

A great confusion arose among the birds; they wished to come to Moses to complain of the evil deed that had been done, but feared to approach him; for the man Moses had changed. Then he had been young and happy, a shepherd, playing with, the birds; and now his face frowned, he was busily occupied and did not even glance at the birds! Was this the good Moses who had rescued the nestlings from the fire?

And the young lads of the children of Israel spread out in the wilderness to find nests and they took the mothers with the young . . .

The bird made haste to leave their nests and went far into the wilderness and mounted to the summit of Mount Sinai, to the place where no man could overtake them. Only the mothers sitting on their tender children stayed in the nests and waited trembling for the young to grow and their wings to sprout.

And not a bird was seen in the neighbourhood, and the joyful chirping was no longer heard.

III.

And one day the birds heard:

“Moses is giving the Torah to Israel on Mount Sinai.”

All the birds from round about assembled and sent emissaries to Moses. The bird emissaries flew and soared aloft to the upper reaches of Mount Sinai and found Moses standing with a chisel in his hand, and he was engraving on two stone tablets.

They stood on the tablets and said: “Moses! The Torah which you are giving to Israel - what is written therein?”

Moses said: “Thou shalt not kill.”

Said the birds: “And do you know that the children of Israel have found bird's nests and taken the mothers with the young?”

Moses was silent.

Said the birds: “You are silent, but we will not be silent, we will beat with our wings, we will chirp ceaselessly, nor will we allow you to speak, until you write in the Torah one commandment, one sentence for the protection of the birds! “

Moses stood a moment occupied with his thoughts, and then lifted shining eyes to the birds, and said to them: “You are right, my friends. I will write it so in the Torah! “.

The emissaries returned with the good tidings to those that had sent them.

One day passed, two days passed.

And on the third day in the morning, when all the children of Israel were gathered at the foot of the mountain, the birds came in great numbers, one flock after another like grey clouds, and they surrounded the mountain and hovered and trembled in the air.

And Moses read the words of the Torah before the people, commandment after commandment, sentence after sentence. And then he raised his eyes aloft and called in a loud voice:

“If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way, in any tree, or on the ground whether they be young ones, or eggs, and the mother sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the mother with the young!”

The flocks of birds hovered in the air.

There was great silence round about.

Not a bird twittered!

Levin Kipnis

IN THE FIELDS OF EPHRAT

(This story describes harvest customs in the Land of Israel in ancient days.)

IN the fields of Bethlehem the farmers of Israel stood amid the corn. Some swung their scythes among the stalks and sang: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy;" others bound sheaves, singing: "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him;" and still others gathered in the grain into the threshing-floor, and they sang: "My standing corn knelt and bowed to my sheaf. Lord! Bless-my strength to gather my grain;" And the field was filled with work and song.

Then came Eliav with his wife and two sons to their portion of the field to begin the harvest. And Eliav and his wife and two sons came into the standing corn from the four corners of his field. And they all were enveloped there, for the full tall stalks covered them over, and you could not see that men had come into the corn. But the scythes glittered swiftly in the hands of the quick workers, and the stalks fell here and there, and the heads of the reapers were seen in the golden sea. A neighbour saw them and called out to Eliav:

"From your standing corn to your threshing-floor, my neighbour! "

"From your vineyard to your wine-cellar! " replied Eliav - one blessing in return for another.

"The blessing of the Lord on you," called out Eliav's wife to her neighbour. "Have you washed the wool of your flocks?"

"The Lord be with you, my neighbour," she replied. "I have both washed it and carded it."

"I have already woven thread."

"The Lord sends us blessings according to our abilities!"

"Zizz! Zizz!" whispered Eliav's scythe in the corn, and was as if he had scolded and said:

"Hush, women. Don't gossip so much. Time to work."

The women cut short their conversation, and swung their scythes in the corn.

"Zizz! Zizz!" whispered the scythes to each other.

At that time there passed a wanderer from the land of Moab, and he was very tired and hungry, and Eliav saw him and called out:

"The Lord be with you, wanderer! Turn hither, and pluck for yourself ears from the corn, and bless the Lord that he has sent us his blessing."

And the wanderer came, and plucked ears, and ate, and was sated.

"Wait, wanderer," Eliav said to him. "'Behold I am cutting my corn; take from the corner."

And Eliav said to him:

"This is the custom of the Hebrew farmers: when they reap their corn, they leave stalks in the corner of the field for the poor and the wandering, and this is called the 'corner.'"

And the wanderer plucked corn from the edge of Eliav's field, and beat it out, and rubbed it, and placed the seed in his pouch, and went on.

And the wanderer passed the field of Eliav's neighbour, and a voice called out behind him:

"O, blessed of the Lord! Why do you shame me? For I have done you no wrong."

And the wanderer was taken aback and said:

"O, my lord, when did I shame you? For I am a stranger. Only now have I come from the land of Moab, and I have never seen your face until today."

"And do you not shame me," replied the farmer, "when you pass my field while I am binding the sheaves and do not gather the gleanings?"

"What are the 'gleanings'?" asked the wanderer.

"This is the law of the Hebrews," answered the farmer. "The reaper grasps a handful of stalks and the scythe cuts them below. The stalks which have slipped from the hand and escaped the scythe -they are not for the reaper. The Lord has saved them for the poor and the wandering."

The wanderer took the gleanings, rubbed them, placed the seed in his pouch, and went on.

And the wanderer went up to the mountain, and a voice called out to him:

"Wanderer! Will you do thus to me? Behold I am making a threshing-heap, and will you not turn to me and collect the forgotten?"

"O my Lord. I know what are the 'gleanings' and the 'corner,' but I do not know what the 'forgotten' is."

And the farmer said: "This is the law of the Hebrew farmer: when a man gathers his sheaves to the threshing-heap, and has forgotten sheaves behind him, it is a sign that the Lord has given them to the wandering and the poor. Now you go and pass through my field, and you will seek and find sheaves, and take unto you what the Lord has saved for your sake."

And the wanderer went and found the forgotten sheaves and beat them out and rubbed them, and placed the seed in his pouch, and went his way.

Yehuda Steinberg

SINAI

I

EVERY man and woman in the villages of the Goshen district knew them: Tahpanes, tall and ready of hand, with his rough voice and his ever-loud speech, and Moses of the long curls and pale face, who was all so fragile and had the eyes of a dreamer. Both were of the offspring of the Hebrew who had settled in Egypt; but in those days the fixed bounds between the tribes had not yet been established. Moses had already been in Moph twice, and once even at No-Amon when the sorcerers foregathered, he had ascended the pulpit and uttered an ode; he had spoke of high matters and been a wonder; and Tahpanes was likewise a watchword already by reason of his powerful hands and great strength, for thrice at the season of the festival of the rising of the Nile had he been in Zoan and won the victory among the wrestlers.

The two shepherds, always good companions used to lead their flocks together among the hills to the wilderness, and would go as far as Sinai and Horeb and even the Mount of Myrrh. And these journeys both loved one in order to breathe the mountain air that strengthens sinews and muscles, the other to dream his dreams whenever he sat alone under the blue of the dome of Heaven.

Once they were herding together in the wilderness. "Hark you", Tahpanes suddenly approached and called, "we must rise now and seek the straying goat until we find it. Rise and aid me." "The goat?" asked Moses, rousing from his dreams. "Of what goat do you speak?" "The black goat of Rameses the baker. It has vanished since the morning. My dogs and I have sought through all the valley as far as Sinai, but I fear I have missed the right track. And now it will be evening in a little while and the wolves will fall on the goat. Therefore we need to make haste and seek it on the slopes of the mountain."

Moses languidly rose and slowly followed his friend. They left the flocks with the boys and the dogs, taking with them only the big sheepdog, and went up the mountain. They sought for about an hour, but in vain. Then Tahpanes said, "Let us separate. I shall ascend here and beyond, and do you turn towards the myrrh thickets near the bush; and take the dog, for I do not need it."

Moses took a few paces towards the bush, and then sat down. The dog waited a while for him, nosing now here now there and sniffing without let or hindrance, then running back impatiently every few moments to its master to see whether he was following. But when it saw him seated motionless, it leapt and barked out very loud and hastened up the mountainside in great leaps to overtake Tahpanes.

Meanwhile Tahpanes ascended the mountain and searched behind every boulder and within every thicket; a few hours passed in search and then he returned to find his friend still sitting where he had left him. , "What is this? Did you allow me to seek while you took your ease and slept?" "I never slept," Moses made answer. Tahpanes said nothing but hastened into the midst of the bush arid vanished. In a while his dog scented the black goat of Rameses the baker, and Tahpanes set her on his shoulder and returned. He found his friend still seated on the stone at which he had left him. "Come, here is the goat! " But Moses never answered, for this time he really was asleep. So Tahpanes roused him.

"See I have found the goat! Now rise and let us go in a little it will be light." Silent and wordless they descended to the valley. Moses face was very pale and his knees

shook, and Tahpanes, the strong lad who had never known weariness, aided him. And as they came to the flocks the morning star arose.

II

In Zoan of Egypt they were celebrating the festival of the Nile. This festival did not compare in splendour to that of Isis and Osiris at Moph or that of Apis the bull at No-Amon. Only the inhabitants of the surrounding countryside, the toilers the builders of the store-cities and the shepherds, came hither to see the dances and the games when the jumpers and the runners and the wrestlers strove one against the other; and sometimes men with knowledge would come from afar, and if they found a one to their liking among the victors, they would persuade him to go to the great cities and show his strength and skill before the princes and the mighty of the land.

Fourteen lads stepped naked into the field. The trumpeters blew their blasts, the overseers gave the sign and the contests began. The jumper must be tested thrice, and should he not leap beyond the bound appointed he must leave the field. Pithom was among those who leapt and succeeded, while Tahpanes succeeded at the first trial and was wondered at, for he needed no further attempt; but Puti fell to the ground, twisting his foot. Then the trumpeters blew their blasts, the officials gave the sign and the races began. Only seven lads stepped into the field, but the others might take no part. On was first among the runners and would have reached the post in a moment. Pithom was behind him, followed by Tahpanes; but the friends and supporters of Tahpanes, who prided themselves on him called and gave him heart, and at the last moment he reached the post before the others.

Then the trumpeters blew their blasts, the priests gave the sign and the wrestlers took the field; only two came forward, for none were left to take part save On and Tahpanes. The overseers rubbed their flesh with woolen kerchiefs and poured oil upon them and anointed them and then they began. On seized Tahpanes by the thighs, gripped him and tried to throw him, but Tahpanes butted at him with his stone-hard brow till he forced him back; then he seized his left hand and squeezed the fingers in his palm until On cried out with pain, and then he threw him. And the contest was renewed a second and a third time, with Tahpanes the victor again and again.

The villagers, who were acquainted with On stamped their feet and hissed and whistled for anger. But the friends of Tahpanes shouted and roared and encouraged him, and afterwards they bore him on their hands to the place where the officials sit. And the first priest gave him the papyrus inscribed with hieroglyphics, the second priest sprinkled him with Nile water, while the third, the High Priest himself, bound the reed to his head with his own hand.

And a multitude gathered round Tahpanes, pressing from far and near all about him, while the experienced ones who had come from afar felt the muscles of his arms and the thews of his thighs.

"Had you run a whit better you might have hoped to stand before Apis next year among the men of might who lead him at the festival in No-Amon", said the one. But the other approached him, bent the knee, bowed to earth and felt the corded flesh and the joints of his legs. "Come with me," said he to him, "I shall instruct you and be certain that if you learn from me for six months you will assuredly receive the wreath fashioned of

the hair of the tail of Apis in No-Amon." The eyes of Tahpanes grew bright. "Go with him !" cried all his friends and fellow country-men, their eyes brightening as well.

III

The feast came next. Tahpanes sprawled on the dais beside the priests, the noble officials and the leaders of the people; beside him stood the man who would be his instructor, never leaving him even for a moment; near them were the men and the villagers who celebrated the festival.

Then came Moses, his pipe in his hand. Slowly, slowly did he approach, as though he were dreaming till he stood before the priests. And the instant Tahpanes noticed his presence he leapt to his feet and made a place for him, setting his strong arm about him and pressing him to his side.

"Would you sing?" he asked. "Come up here." And he guided him on to the dais with his own hand. "Be still, Moses would sing the praises of Tahpanes, would recount his valour!" cried the townsmen who knew Tahpanes and esteemed him.

And Moses began, but he did not sing the praises of the victor Tahpanes; nor did he laud his valour.

He sang of that evening, when a hush had been poured upon all things and he and his flock had been in the field by Mount Sinai. And he had told his flock and his herd and found that one was lost. And he had gone forth to seek it and had climbed in to the mazy ways of the Mount. Night came and storm-winds passed over the surface of the earth, lightning leapt and flashed amid the rocks and boulders while thunders rolled and echoed among the many crags; yet he had not stood still but had climbed and climbed aloft. Gaping crevasses he had leapt across and clambered up the steep.

And the tempest turned to silence while he laboriously passed through the oak wood; and of a sudden there was a wondrous sight before him. A mighty, fearsome tongue of flame leapt from the briar, and the briar flamed-in fire, flamed and flamed yet was not consumed. And an angel of God soared aloft in the flame while a voice cried "Moses, Moses!" And he had been afraid to draw near. Then he had doffed his shoes and had taken two or three paces forward, but he could go no further; and the voice had spoken and he had hearkened, hiding his face and fearing to look.

Then had come a beating of wings such as had never yet been, such as had never yet been heard of ear.

And the Glory of God appeared while he hid his face in his two hands; yet he could perceive it. And God had spoken unto him: "Go return unto Egypt and fashion me a people. And dost thou know how a people shall be fashioned? The slave and the unfortunate shalt thou summon unto thee, all those who moan for toil and for overmuch labour, who are afflicted of the oppressor and the official, who possess nought saving it be a heart wherein is a little suffering; and thou shalt speak unto them, and lead them forth from the house of bondage, and shalt redeem them, and shalt give them statutes and laws; and thou shalt make them into a people."

"For a man may fashion him Pithom and Rameses, and a man may fashion giants in the skies, and pyramids and obelisks, and a man may set sphinxes to be for ever and aye. Yet are all these nought, and all these works are of no account to that great creating when a man builds a people. And thou shalt create me a people!"

"Go thou to Egypt and come unto the afflicted and the unfortunate, to all that sigh and are oppressed, and say unto them that they are slaves; and they shall not understand. And say unto them that they are unfortunate, and they shall not know it. And that their suffering is great and great their pains and dread their affliction; and they shall not believe. And thou shalt force their eyes open with a strong hand for all their affliction and all their suffering; and thou shalt redeem them."

"And many people shall be drawn after thee from the midst of thy brethren, whom thou hast not known and who know thee not as yet; and from amidst all the people round about with whom it fares ill and bitter; and thou shalt be the father of a great multitude and the head of its tribes; and of the worms thou shalt fashion Man; and of Man -a nation and of the dust and sands -a land.

"And Pithom and Rameses shall vanish, and the pyramids shall fall, and the obelisks shall drop asunder, and sphinxes shall be no more; but this people shall stand firm. For the people of the unfortunates shall not vanish from the face of the land as long as the heavens arch over the earth."

And there was a beating of wings such as never yet has been. And the briar flamed and burned while he covered his face with both hands and saw.

IV

And Moses was silent, and all those who hearkened round about were also still.

Then Tahpanes rose. "He speaks falsehood! " cried he. "Every word that leaves his lips is false! All he says he has invented! I -myself was with him that night when we sought the lost goat! 'Twas the black goat of Rameses the baker! I and he, we went up to the mountains together. But there were no stormwinds, for it was a clear bright night. Where did he see the gaping deeps of which he spoke? What does he tell of thunders rolling and rumbling amid the crags? What has he to do with the flaming briar and the Angel of God and God? By the life of Pharaoh none of all this did happen! I went up to the rocks alone and bade him go with the dog into the bushes near the myrrh; but he sat him down on a stone and fell asleep. All night long I sought till I found the lost goat, and when I returned I found him still sitting sleeping on the stone. Send him out him for his falsehoods!"

The men standing round were raging and shouting. Moses still stood unmoving, resting his dream-laden eyes on the famous men, like one who neither knew nor understood why they were all storming and shouting. He was perplexed and his eyes wandered searching round till they fell on the old priest. "Let him be!" cried Aaron. "I shall be his shield!"

But the mob stormed and raised its fists. "Why shield him! Put him to death, put the liar to death!"

Then the priest drew near to Moses, set his left hand on his shoulder and stretched out his right arm.

"Give him to us! " cried Tahpanes. "He is a liar! "

"A liar? - Why, he but sings his song!"

V

And the song became truth.

Ask the boy going to school with his book under his arm.

Ask him, "What do you know of Sinai?"

He will answer you, "On Mount Sinai God revealed himself to Moses, Lord of the prophets, who saw God face to face as no man other has seen Him and lived. And the briar flamed in the fire but was not consumed; and God came down to him and spoke and gave him courage to go to Egypt and bring the Children of Israel out of the house of bondage and give them the land of their fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And when Pharaoh hardened his heart -"

I am certain that for a full hour he will tell you of that Mount Sinai, unto which God descended in the fire, and where he gave Torah and judgment to Israel, giving them land he had sworn to their father.

Often enough he will be able to recite you, word for word, all that God spake by Moses' mouth on Mount Sinai. Even now, and thousands of years afterwards. Is there any place upon Earth more praiseworthy than Sinai?

David Frishman

KING DAVID'S CAVE

(Note: The original English translation has been preserved, which may at times challenge the reader, but it's a wonderful piece nonetheless to read.)

THERE were in a certain town two God-fearing and virtuous youths. They were loyal comrades and fast friends, and they were extremely poor; they had nothing in their world except their bodies, emaciated from much fasting, their clothes, tattered from much wear, and their eyes, faded from much study of the scrolls of mystery and the calculation of the Redemption. And both sat all the days alone, confined before God in a small wall-garret, four ells by four, each solitary in his corner, each isolated with the scrolls of his books, hoping with their souls for the End of Days and looking forward to the Salvation.

On a certain Saturday night in the month of Iyar, the seventh night after the new moon of Iyar, the youths were asleep on the floor in their garret, as was their custom, each curled up in his corner, each with his poor bundle under his head, and the half-moon gazed at them through the window and sowed its miserable light among the shadows of the room.

And they both dreamed the same dream that night; and lo, they were standing in a field, blessing the moon before it became full. And as they turned for the threefold greeting to each other, as the usage is, they say yet a third man, a wonderfully ancient man, of whom they knew not who he was nor whence he had come, standing - and blessing the moon with them, his closed eyes turned towards the heavens, his beard flowing like silver on his heart and a golden key hanging from his waist. And the youths wondered greatly, but did not interrupt their prayer; but rather on the contrary: for at the sight of the old man their hearts grew suddenly warm and their prayer flamed from their mouths like a torch of fire. And they danced before the moon, and all their bones sang, and in the end their prayer took fire and became a blaze, and the three roared like lions in the field, "David King of Israel lives indeed!"

While yet were they shouting and repeating a second and a third time, behold a marvel: from shout to shout the moon filled out continuously, until it was all full and pure before their eyes, nor was there a trace of stain in it. And the moon stood pure and whole in the heart of the heavens, and its light was as strong and clear as the splendour of the sun in its might, and it illumined all the field round about from end to end.

Then suddenly the old man turned to them and said: "May our Sabbath be peaceful and your month blessed, sons of the Living God! Know that the guardian of the Cave of King David in Mount Zion am I. Each month, at the time of the blessing of the moon, when from the mouths of tens of thousands of the people of Israel the great cry goes up, 'David King of Israel lives indeed,' the King rouses from his sleep in the cave and raises his head slightly, and stretches his hands silently to the cruse of water at his head in dumb hope: 'Will no man come to pour water for his king, to release him from the bonds of slumber, that he may go out to his people to bring it the Redemption?' But each time the hands of the King return empty.

"There is no man of the children of exile to come to Jerusalem to pour water on the hands of his King when he rouses. The moments of good will and mercy come

futilely to an end, and the King's head sinks back powerless on his resting-place. And now, if truly and wholly you long for the Redemption, tarry not an instant. Go wander through the land, and at the end of thirty days, on the seventh day after the coming new moon, on the feast of Shavuot, the death-day of King David, you will find the Cave in which he sleeps his sleep. And you shall penetrate and enter it, and you shall do all that God will show you through his messengers on the way. And as you go forth, guard yourselves well against all that is unclean, retreat not before Satan, and let not your heart stray after any coveted thing: beware, for I have warned you! Go in peace.” And as he finished speaking, the moon suddenly grew dim, and the old man disappeared and was no longer there.

And the youths rose early in the morning to weep for the exile of the Spirit of God and to mourn the destruction of the House of God in Jerusalem, as was their custom, and they recalled the dream which they had dreamed in the night, and they told it to each other, and they marvelled greatly, because the matter of the dream of each was the same, and they considered this and they said: “God must have sent us the word of truth in the night through his messenger. Let us rise and act.”

And the youths tarried not, but rose up and girded their loins, and each took his staff and his pouch in his hand, and they set out from their place and from their city to wander through the country and to seek the Cave of King David, as was the word of the ancient man in the dream. And the youths walked day and night, night and day, and they strayed in all roads, and they followed all the paths, and they sought all the places, but did not find, and they asked the wayfarers: “Tell us, wayfarers, perhaps know you where is the Cave of King David?”

But of all the wayfarers there was none who spoke or made reply, for none knew its place. And it went extremely ill with the youths and they were impatient from the toil of the road. But they made their way further, and thus they went without rest day and night, night and day, for a month, until their feet swelled, and their garments and their shoes withered away from them, and no longer did they have strength to walk. They were almost about to despair, but they lifted up their eyes and they saw the mountain of God, Mount Zion. And they renewed their strength, and they walked where there was no path or road among the shattered rocks, and they went to the left and to the right and then went directly forward, and as they came near to the mountain - they halted. They were still gazing about them, when behold -an old and hairy man was approaching them from the side of the mountain, and he was clad in a great cloak, with a leathern girdle about him, and a golden key was hanging from his waist.

The youths recognized him: for he was the ancient man whom they had seen in the dream, and their hearts were exceedingly glad, and they ran forward to meet him and bowed before him and said: “Peace to you, old man, let us go up.” 'And the old man answered them with a shining face Peace, peace to you, sons of the Living God, truly have you come on the death-day of King David to his tomb,” and he motioned them to follow him.

So the youths followed him in silence. And he approached an iron door hidden in the side of the mountain, and struck it a powerful blow, and he called three times: “Open

the gates!” The door opened, and he said: “Go, he is resting in peace on his couch with a cruse of water at his head; reach a square rock, and you shall roll the stone away and you will reach a chamber, and then you will find there King David straight forward in confidence, and fear not. And you will see the cruse of water is the water of Salvation which Adam drew from the rivers of the Garden of Eden, so that Salvation might spring from it later days. And when the King stretches forth his hands to you, hasten to pour the water on them. Then will the King rouse from his sleep, and like a lion from his den will he come forth, and he will bring the Redemption to his people and will gather their scattered ones from the four corners of the earth Jerusalem.”

Yet were the youths throbbing with the words of the old man, when flames of fire separated them, and lo, there was a chariot of fire and horses of fire -and the ancient man went before their eyes in a storm to Heaven.

Then the youths knew that the Herald of the Redemption, Elijah the Prophet, had they seen with their own eyes, and their hearts failed them and they fell on their faces to the ground. Then they roused themselves and made haste to go further in the Cave, as was the word of the ancient man. And they cleaved through the darkness, and reached the end in peace, and found a stone fixed in the wall. And they removed the stone, and behold, there was a chamber before them, and all its surface was gold. And in the chamber was a couch of gold, and on it rested King David in the splendour of his old age, and his appearance was that of a slumbering lion. The Spirit of God illumined his countenance; at his head were his spear and the cruse of water; a lighted candle was at his feet, and a golden harp hung on the wall; and on the golden table before him were crown and sceptre, all precious stones, and an open Book of Psalms. Yet were they a-marvel at the sight -- when the King stretched forth his hands to them.

But the youths were greatly startled from the abundance of gold and of all the precious things they had found in the chamber, and at that moment they fastened their eyes on a large brilliance which shone to them from the King’s crown whose appearance was that of the full moon in their dream on that night. And they stood as if dreaming and wonderstruck, and the soles of their feet cleaved to the ground, and as they tarried --lo, the King withdrew his hands, and sighed silently, and his head sank back and fell powerless back on his couch.

Then were the young men aroused from the amazement in their hearts, and they remembered the cruse of water, but to no avail; they had already missed the time and there was no storing it. And suddenly there was a dark dread round about. The scene vanished and was gone, as if it had never been. A wind burst at them from secret places and threw the youths to the field far away from the Cave. And when their spirits returned to them, they looked, and lo, they were in the small roof-garret in their city in Exile, miserable and wretched as on every day. .

*Adapted from legends by
Ch. N. Bialik and K. .A. Shapira*

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

"And Moses went down from the mount unto the people" (Exodus 19, 14). "This teaches us that Moses did not turn to his own affairs but went from the Mount to the people" (Rashi). But what "affairs" did Moses have other than the study of the Torah? "Moses did not turn to his own affairs," teaches us that even to these "affairs" - the study of the Torah and the Will of God -Moses did not turn at a time when he was dealing with public matters.

Rabbi Yechezkiel of Kuzmir therefore said, that public matters done publicly are more important than the affairs of God done privately.

MOSES SPAKE

"Moses spake, and God answered him" (Exodus 19, 19). Rabbi Moshe Avigdor A'miel said: "The passage does not say "Moses spoke" {diber} but "Moses will speak" (yedaber). Moses has not yet spoken his last word.

For more than three thousand years Moses has been speaking and has not yet made an end of speaking, but will continue to speak, and God will answer him. This is not the case with the prophets of idolaters, whose prophecies have come to an end and whose lying lips have fallen silent, for the Word of God will exist forever.

WHY DID ZIVA CRY?

IN our kibbutz, in the Emek, something very strange happened last Shavuot - Ziva cried!

You don't believe me? You say, "What? Ziva? It can't be!"

Well, listen, I'll tell you how it happened.

All the *chaverim* were standing in the farmyard that day opposite the big stage which had been built on bales of straw. Everyone was arranged in special groupings, the children according to their classes, and the grown-ups according to their work on the farm. The workers of the grain fields, dressed in blue work clothes, stood beside the heavy tractors, the bales of grain and the harvesters. The workers of the cowshed, wearing white, stood beside Bruriah their prize cow, bedecked in garlands of green leaves. The workers of the green-fodder fields stood holding their scythes, the workers of the vineyards had brought baskets full of fresh grapes, and those of the chicken house had brought small hen roosts full of birds.

There they stood, singing, watching the girls dancing on the stage, and smiling at the sight of the white pigeons flying about in the air -till a voice cried out, "Let the people bring forth their gifts!"

And then, each group, one by one, brought forth its first fruits, an offering to the Jewish National Fund.

The workers of the cowshed brought a heifer and a bull- calf.

The workers of the grain-fields brought sheaves of wheat and barley.

The poultry workers brought chickens, a pair of pigeons and lots of eggs.

And the children too brought their gifts. The youngest one brought a few radishes, and flowers, and fancy albums of drawings. The children from the kindergarten brought a tender young goat, and ears of corn, and goose eggs from their own goose-house.

Then came the school children, and just like the grown-ups. each branch of their *meshek* brought forth its first fruits.

Uzi, who is quite big boy, brought a loaf of bread which the children of his class had baked from flour which they themselves had milled out of wheat that they themselves had sown and reaped. And as the children passed by, the whole crowd burst with joy, and the very heavens sang, and the sun with his rays of gold reigned over all this merriment -and the Bikkurim were brought forth with gladness and confidence, and everybody was happy.

Then the second year pupils, who had raised sheep and goats, were called upon to bring forth their first fruits. There was a sudden hush. The singing stopped and everybody listened, stood on tip-toe, craned their necks and wondered, "What will happen now?"

Ziva stepped forward and went towards the stage, but she was not carrying a gift. Everybody looked on tensely. There was complete silence. Ziva mounted the stairs, went up to the "First Fruits" man, stood facing him, lifted up her head and then, at closehand, we could see that her eyes were shining, and tears rolled down her cheeks. Ziva was crying! Nobody knew why. They only saw that she was not carrying a gift. But I know Listen, and I'll tell you what happened.

Ziva was in charge of the goat and sheep pen of the children's *meshek*. Every day she took out the goat, the ewe and the lamb to pasture. (In the children's goat and sheep pen there was one nanny-goat, one ewe and one lamb). She brought them water, left them fresh green fodder for the night, and she milked the goat and the ewe. Everyone knew that for weeks she had been preparing a "big surprise" -sheep and goat's cheese. Ziva had decided not to give the lamb as a gift because she wanted it to grow up, so instead she decided to make cheese and give that to the Keren Kayemeth. Every day she took the milk (which of course did not amount to very much) and made a bit of cheese out of it. Then she put it away in the big ice-box in the children's kitchen.

And each day the amount of cheese grew; and when It was almost Shavuot, there was a big pile of the finest cheese imaginable in the ice-box. Ziva watched carefully over her gift, and everybody was certain that she would win the prize for the finest gift at the Festival of the First Fruits.

And then Shmuelik came home, Shmuelik the soldier. He came home on a few days leave. He went over to the house and he sat with the children in their classrooms, and told them about the countries he had visited, the *Galut*, and the camps with Jewish refugees; he told them about hunger and cold, about children without food. Shmuelik told them that he was soon going back to the far-away *Galut*, and that he was taking with him packages of food and clothing for the Jews in the camps.

Nobody knew what Ziva did, because she didn't tell anybody. She took her treasured cheese that was so good, it up very well, and -as if she had completely forgotten about the Festival of the First Fruits and the prize she was to win, thrust the cheese into Shmuelik's wide pack the day before he left, and did not even tell Shmuelik about it.

Nobody in the *kibbutz* knew about this. On Shavuot, the day of the Festival of the First Fruits, Ziva mounted the stage, and everybody waited to see the wonderful cheese which she had made, and everybody was quite sure that she would win the prize.

And instead -tears; Ziva stood empty-handed and a heavy silence fell over the gathering.

But suddenly, a loud, ringing voice was heard from the stage. "Attention, everybody! At noon today we received a letter from Shmuelik.. Listen to what he writes." He took a letter out, of his pocket and began to read: "On the road I met a group of children going to Israel. I told them about our country, and about the Festival of the First Fruits that we will soon celebrate. I told them about the children's *meshek* that we have on our kibbutz. They were very happy to hear all about their young friends in Israel. I looked into my pack for something to give them, and what do you think I found? A box of the most wonderful, tasty sheep and goat's cheese. I divided it amongst all the children. How they loved it! They asked me to write you a letter thanking the sender of the cheese. How happy the children were to taste the produce of the homeland."

Ziva stood stunned. Her eyes were still full of tears, but there was already a smile on her lips. And again a voice was heard from the stage, "The sheep and goats branch of the children's *meshek* is awarded first prize for the finest gift to the Festival of the First Fruits, for very good cheese. And for Ziva who carefully made the cheese. . three cheers!" And the whole *kibbutz* 'Shouted, "Heidad! Heidad!" in honour of the little girl who had come to the stage empty-handed.

M. Ofer

DANNY'S BIKKURIM

DAN lived on the third storey in a big white house in Tel- Aviv. There was no yard beside the house, no garden.

All round there was nothing but concrete and brick and iron. The house was made of brick; and so was the path. The fence was iron; and the sidewalk was concrete. That's how it is in the city.

Dan came here from the country. There, in the country, the brown earth laughs with poppies, rustles and whispers with golden ears of corn. You plant a little seed in the earth, and in a few days' time it sprouts. A little shoot pokes its head out of the ground. Lovely! Yes, that's how it is in the country.

There, in the country, Dan had a garden. It was all his own. In his garden he sowed and he planted, and he worked hard. And he had a little dovecot there, with two doves in it. They drank the water and ate the bread he gave them -a darling pair of doves.

But Dan left all these things behind and came with his father and mother to live in the city. Dan wandered about the big house for a day, and then another day -and on the third day he disappeared. Mummy looked for him, daddy looked for him ...but he wasn't to be found.

In the evening he appeared, covered with dirt and perspiration, with a great big box on his back. Dan put the box on the balcony, filled it with earth, smoothed the earth down and hoed it, sowed ten grains of wheat, planted a cabbage seedling and a cauliflower seedling, sowed six beans and seven spinach seeds, eight little spring onions, and flowers all round for decoration - and there was a garden in the box!

Dan waited a couple of days, and then a shoot appeared in the box, a little green leaf looked out, and then another, and yet another.

Things were growing in Dan's garden. Mummy was angry: "Dan makes the house dirty, he brings earth into the house on his' shoes, and after all is it worth wasting all that time on a little spring onion? Take a couple of coppers and go to the market, and buy as much onion as you want."

Dan listened and said nothing -but he said to himself: "Yes, but my little onion is different; I planted him in the earth myself. He sprouted, sent out a little leaf, prayed to the sun, asked for dew. Every morning he looked at me with his little green eyes and this is what he said: "Good morning, Danny. Look! I'm growing. I've sent up leaves. Aren't you happy?" " (Yes, Dan understands the language of the little shoots and the little leaves.)

Auntie said, "A garden in a box. What good is it?" And Daddy added, "What a waste of time, Danny!" Only Granny with her kind eyes looking through her spectacles, laughed and said, "You will see that this little garden will bring joy to the child's heart. Let the little one go on working. What harm does it do?"

And Danny hugged his granny, and kissed the wrinkles on her face. Danny was happy. He skipped from one foot to the other and sang, "I've got a garden, a lovely little garden." Danny loved the little garden in the box. When the rain fell in the winter, Dan asked:

*Rain, rain, beautiful rain!
Come and water my garden again
Till the onion-shoots so green
And the ears of wheat are seen.*

*Make the cauliflower swell
And the pods of beans as well;
Water the carrots in the ground;
Make the flowers grow all round."*

And then, when the sun came back in the spring, and sent out golden rays, Danny begged:

*"Sun of spring, please won't you shine
On this little plot of mine
Till the onion-shoots so green
And the ears of wheat are seen.*

*Make the cauliflower swell
And the pods of boons as well;
Shine on the carrots in the ground,
Make the flowers grow all round."*

The little drops of rain heard Danny's prayer and watered the garden. The sun's rays heard Dan's prayer and warmed the garden. And so the garden flourished in the box.

One morning, a voice was heard, faraway; sweet and, melodious, "Coo...coo...coo. . ." And a second "voice answered, "Coo...coo. . .coo. . ." And a darling pair of doves came flying round and round above Danny's head. And the darling pair of doves settled on Danny's head.

The mother dove said, "Coo-coo-coo! Here, between the box and the wall, let's build our nest. Let's lay our eggs. We'll have a son and a daughter too!"

And the father dove answered, "Coo-coo-coo-coo! Certainly, my dove, my love, my darling. Here we'll have our nest. Here we'll lay our eggs. We'll have a son and a daughter too."

And Danny sat and listened, and his heart beat so fast. . . Just imagine! He'd have a dovecot, a real dovecot with a darling pair of doves. Just like in the country, a real dovecot. So the doves built their nest between the box and the wall, and Danny was busy all the day, from morning till evening.

Danny worked hard without a stop, tending every shoot, every seedling, bringing buckets of water out onto the balcony, collecting grain for his doves. And the garden grew in the box and the garden flourished in the box; and in the nest -a darling pair of doves, with voices just like bells.

In the box, the corn came up . . . the ears filled up with golden kernels . . . the cauliflower grew round and fat, the bean-pods filled out . . . the spinach grew green . . . the spring onions came up . . . and the flowers flourished all around . . . First ripe fruits in Danny's garden!

What should Danny do with them? Should he pick them? Should he taste them? Or perhaps he should bring his granny. on a plate, a bunch of onions, a cabbage and a cauliflower, and a handful of bean-pods? Granny would be happy . . . She'd be delighted! Or perhaps he should wait . . . Only a few days. .. And march to the square with all the people in the Procession of the First-ripe Fruits, just as he had done every year in the village? He would bring Bikkurim ...A present to the Keren Kayemeth . . . which buys land, brown land for fields and gardens. Yes! That was the thing to do!

Danny waited . . . controlled himself ...didn't pick a thing . . .until the day came! The Festival of the First-ripe Fruits!

Then Dan plaited -a garland of ears of corn and put it on his head. He dressed himself in a white suit -his Shabbat suit. He invited Daddy and Granny. He invited Mummy and little one-year-old Yemimah on to the balcony.

Then Dan went up to the box and whispered, "The sun blesses everything, it sends its rays down on all the plants, even the plants in a little garden in a box or a basket. And the dew comes down on everything that grows. Look! Just look! In my little garden too the fruit is ripe." That's what Danny said.

And Danny took a basket and put in ten golden ears of corn, a bunch of spring onions with long leaves, a green cabbage, and a cauliflower. He put into the basket ten bean-pods and some spinach, and decorated the basket with beautiful flowers.

And suddenly - there was a darling pair of doves above Dan's head. They flew round about Danny's head, and came to rest on his shoulders. And so Dan left the house and went on his way. Where did he go? To the great square in the city park.

Look! Look! There's little Danny marching in the procession, with a full basket of first-ripe fruits on his arm, and a darling pair of doves sitting on his hands, murmuring, "Coo-coo-coo-coo."

Bella Bar-Am

RHYME AND RHYTHM

(All poems translated and adapted by Myrim.)

SONG OF THE REAPERS

The glorious song of the reapers

Falls into the field

The golden stalks fall with the song

Into the golden yield.

Gather the blessings of the Lord -

Gather from hill and dale.

The grain in the filling threshing-floor

For many a year will avail.

Clear and pure then was the tear

With which we did our sowing.

Sevenfold now is pure and clear

The singing of our mowing.

Soon the golden cornstalks

In sheaves will all be bound,

Standing each of them erect,

Proudly on the ground.

The song of the reapers soars on high

And falls into the corn.

Drenched by the oils of the earth,

And blessed by the dews of morn.

Yitzchak Katzenelson

THE HARVEST FESTIVAL

The fields have grown golden now,
Full-blown is the grain.
The wind among the cornstalks
Whirls and whirls again.
Low bows the heavy grain its head,
To the words of the wind pays heed:
"Glad harvest tidings do I bring –
All men of you have need."

Then comes the farmer riding proud

High on his tractor seat,
Dragging the heavy harvester
Whose blades cut down the wheat.
And into the open sack they stream,
The kernels of golden grain.
He fondles them and his heart leaps up
At sight of the golden rain.

The tractor is noisy, but over all,
A voice mounts clear and loud;
The reaper singing all the songs
Which in his heart do crowd.
Of the toil of sowing and ploughing,
Of the rains that follow prayer,
Of the golden yield in all the field,
And the harvest glowing there.

Yisrael

Bikkurim From the Farm

The trumpet's clear blast, The signal has rung:
 The Shavuot festival
 Has come for the young.
 Now the fruits of our farm
 Let us bring with a song.

Come, all children, Large and small,
 Afoot and awheel
 To the trumpet's call.
 And the tractor, too,
 Will follow us all.

We'll march in step To the top of the hill.
 We'll form our ranks
 To march with a will,
 To gather the fruits
 Of the fields we till.

Shepherd with a lamb, Cowherd with a calf,

All in a pile of hay
 As tall as a staff.
 And boys from the garden
 Bring greens with a laugh.

The grain's first fruits
 A sheaf of wheat;
 A bouquet of flowers,
 Fragrant and sweet;
 Bees' honey; and chicks
 Squeaking tweet..tweet.

Figs in a basket
 From the orchard are brought
 Fruits of all kinds
 With bright colours hot.
 And grapes from the vineyard
 Have not been forgot

Now all together
 To the kitchen we go
 To collect yet another

Surprise gift and -Oh,
It's a wonderful cake,
With icing like snow.

Now take we our gifts
To the platform there,
The season's first fruits
That the gardens bear ,
For the Keren Kayemeth
From its fields So fair.

Yosef Achai

THE RADISH AND THE CUCUMBER

The Radish and Cucumber

Almost went to war:

Each claimed that in the garden

HE'D been ripe before.

Said Radish to Cucumber,

"I was ripe here first."

Said Cucumber to Radish,

"Of liars, you're the worst.

I was first here to be ripe,

I'm oldest - smoke *that* in your pipe."

Radish-face took on a flush,

Cucumber grew as green as plush,

And who knows what might have been

If Lettuce hadn't soon stepped in.

"Dear Radish and good Cucumber ,

There's no need to fight.

Each of you in his own group

First came to see sunlight.

You're both the first, and 'now be good.

And go and join the brotherhood

That's celebrating the right way,

The yearly First Fruits Holiday."

Radish wore a white frock,

Cucumber a green,

And they went along, arm in arm,

With only love between.

In the air there is a hum -

All the garden "firsts" have come.

Hand in hand, and arm in arm,

Marching proudly from the farm:

Tomatoes, carrots, red beetroots,

Eggplant, spinach, onion shoots,

Garlic, cabbage, peas and beans,
 All the family of greens
 Marching gaily on parade,
 Making the gifts that are always made
 In festive spirits, high and gay,
 On the *First Fruits Holiday*.

Anda

My Garden's First Fruits

Not very large is my garden, Not very big -
 A green bed and a pathway And a budding twig.

But small gardens too have sun and dew,

And the fruits grow true.
 The first fruit festival is come anew –
 And to my garden too.

What shall I give - who knows?

But I took it into my head
 To give the twig and the petals of rose
 And all from my one green bed.

The children bring their baskets

As the flute notes fall and rise.
 Wreaths of green adorn their heads;
 Joy fills their shining eyes.

They look into my basket
 And question, "Is that all ?"
 "My garden's very small;"
 I say, "but I have given all -
 I have given all -my all."

Ze'ev

THE MIDNIGHT WISH

Danny heard in school one day
 The legend -so the people say –
 That if a baby on Shavuot night
 Kept his eyes unclosed and bright,
 Exactly at the midnight hour
 He'd see a most Angelic Power
 Split wide the skies,
 And with sharp eyes
 The boy might see for one brief minute
 The open Heaven and all that's in it.

And if he then a wish pronounced

But not to anyone announced
 What he'd wished -an angel band
 Would take him gently by the hand
 And lead him to his heart's desire
 Safely through both flood and fire.

Dan at once made up his mind

That unless his eyes went blind
 He would watch the skies that night
 Waiting for the flash of light
 That showed the miracle time was here
 When angels his wish would gladly hear ,
 The weeks went by and Danny wondered
 What he'd wish when the sky was sundered.
 Of toys and games he had so many,
 Of all good things he lacked not any. \
 What could a boy of years eleven
 Ask with joy of the open Heaven?

The weeks went by and the great day came.
 The first few hours seemed very tame
 To Danny who waited impatiently
 For the time to come when he could see
 The annual miracle of the sky
 And make his wish - and so would I!

The hour -grew late -,
 Wait, Danny, wait.
 Bedtime passed
 And soon, at last,
 'Twas ten o'clock

And then eleven. ...
 Tick~tock, tick. ..tock .
 Danny looked at Heaven.

He crawled into bed –

But laid his head
 Where he could see
 What was to be In the skies -
 But his sleepy eyes
 Winked. ...
 And blinked. ...

A roar

And flash –

A roar

And c r a s h -

And Danny clearly saw the sky
 Burst open, and with a startled cry
 He looked into God's home on high.

Quick!

Now pick -

The best of wishes you can make,
 Now is the time your choice to take.

Suddenly Danny knew what to choose:

Angels above, there's no time to lose

Give me -if I can have anything –

Not the ransom of a king,

Not riches or wealth

Nor even health -

But give me this, I beg of you:
 To grow to become a citizen true.
 Keep my country of Israel strong
 Now and forever, and all my life long

Let me do what I can to keep it so.
 Let me live so that I may know.
 That whatever I do, wherever I go,
 Will make me feel both proud and glad
 That I am an Israel citizen-lad."

No sooner had Danny spoken out
 Than he saw beyond a shadow of doubt
 Hundreds of angels, thousands, millions

(Later he said there were nine quadrillions)
Trooping out of the open) sky,
Marching in orderly ranks on high
Right along the Milky Way.
Which became as bright as the brightest day.

Each came to him, bent over his bed,
Rustled his wings, and whispering said:
"As you've made your choice
So shall it be.
God hears your voice -
As you will see."

Danny heard the sound of bells
And the singing of the song that tells
That angels have been on earth again
Walking among the mortal men.

But all grew suddenly dark around
And daylight came -and with a bound
Dan sprang out of bed, and began to recall
That before the hour of midnight could fall
His head had nodded, his eyes grown dim –
Had angels really visited him?

Whether the angels did or not,
This is surely a comforting thought:
That the secret of the Feast of Weeks
He will find who but well seeks.

Myrim

QUIZ PROGRAMME

(Don't overlook the following for your family. These can be wonderful family activities although intended for youth groups or for school programs.)

A QUIZ programme can add much in the way of entertainment and information to a gathering. The fifteen questions and answers included in this section are only an example of the many questions available pertaining to the holiday which can be utilized in such a programme. A large variety of games can be adapted from the basic quiz.

TEAMS, where the players are divided into two teams, and compete in answering the questions on a team basis, **TRUE OR FALSE** and **FILL IN THE MISSING WORD** are common varieties of the quiz.

Here are some other ways in which the quiz can be adapted:

HAT BOX QUIZ: Write each question on a separate piece of paper, fold and place in a box. Players pick their questions to answer from the box.

HOW QUICK ARE YOU: Each player is given a sheet of questions. A time limit is set and the first player to write the answers to all the questions correctly wins a prize.

DRAW YOUR ANSWER: A question is set to one player at a time and each player draws the answer to his question. The other players are asked to guess from the drawing both the question and the answer.

STUMP 'EM: The players are divided into two teams. Player 1 of Team A asks Team B a question. If Player 1 of Team B answers correctly, Team B gets 10 points. If he doesn't know the answer, and Player 2 answers, the team only gets 9 points, and so on down the line. If no one in Team B can answer the question, Team A gets 10 points, and continues asking questions until Team B finally answers correctly. Then Team B sets the questions to Team A.

QUIZ QUESTIONS:

1. What great event in the early history of our people does Shavuot recall?
2. Near what mountain did the Israelites receive the Ten Commandments?
3. Who brought the Tablets of the Law to the Israelites?
4. How long did Moses remain on Mount Sinai before he brought down the Ten Commandments?
5. What ancient Jewish hero, according to tradition, passed away on Shavuot?

6. What is Tikkun Leil Shavuot?
7. What special book is read in the synagogue on Shavuot?
8. In what Hebrew month does Shavuot occur?
9. Why is this festival called Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks?
10. By what three other names is Shavuot called?
11. What is the agricultural significance of Shavuot?
12. Why is Shavuot called Chag Hakatzir?
13. Why is Shavuot called Chag Habikkurim?
14. What special food is associated with Shavuot?
15. What legend is connected with the night of Shavuot?

QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. It commemorates the Giving of our Torah.
2. Mount Sinai.
3. Moses,
4. Forty days and forty nights.
5. King David.
6. A special service, containing excerpts from the Pentateuch, Prophets and Rabbinic literature, which is recited by pious Jews during the first night of Shavuot.
7. The Book of Ruth.
8. Sivan.
9. Because Shavuot (literally 'weeks') occurs seven weeks after Pesach.
10. Chag Hakatzir (Feast of Harvest), Chag Habikkurim (Feast of First Fruits), Zman Matan Toratenu (Season of the Giving of our Torah).

11. Shavuot marks the beginning of the wheat harvest and the first ripening of fruits in Israel.
12. The harvest season in Israel extends over a period of seven weeks beginning with the barley harvest during Pesach and ending with the harvest of wheat. On the fiftieth day, Shavuot, the concluding festival of the grain harvest is celebrated.
13. On Shavuot each male Israelite brought the first ripe fruits of the wheat harvest to the Temple, in accordance with the Biblical injunction that each Israelite bring to the Temple "the first fruits of the labours which thou hast sown in the field."
14. Dairy foods, the most popular being blintzes.
15. It is believed that at midnight of Shavuot the sky splits open, and he who sees the rift and makes a wish at that moment, will have his wish fulfilled."

GAMES

KEEP OUT OF SIGHT

This game is suitable for 20-25 children and should be played in woods or a park. Divide the players into two teams, assigning to each team three or four of the Seven Species. Each player places on his chest a symbol or leaf of the species he represents. The leader of the game keeps a list of every player and his species.

At a given time the players of one team must reach the home base of the other team without being seen. At the first signal both teams stealthily leave their home bases. When the second signal is blown, after a short warning whistle, the groups are expected to have reached their destination. If any player recognizes a player of the opposite team, he makes a note of his name and the species he wears. No player may cover his face or the species he wears during the game.

Points:

- 1) Any player who has not reached his destination at the second signal loses one point for his team.
- 2) The leader of the game makes a list of all players who were "discovered" during the game. For each player discovered, his group loses one point, and the other team gains one point.
- 3) For each player who reaches the destination in time, his team gains two points. The team which gets the most points wins the game.

WHO AM I? WHAT AM I?

The leader of the game pins on the back of each player the name of some character or symbol associated with Shavuot. From the comments of the players around him, each one must guess his own name.

BIBLICAL CHARACTERS

Players sit in a circle. First player names a Biblical character, e.g. Ruth. The next player must give a name which begins with the last letter of the previous name, i.e. Ruth, H - Haman, N - Naomi and so on.. Any player who fails to answer properly within 30 seconds is eliminated from the game.

A STRANGE STORY

The group leader tells the story of Shavuot, deliberately making errors in the tale. The players jot down each mistake they can detect. At the end of the story the player who has found the most mistakes is the winner.

FIND 'EM

Symbols of the Seven Species and other suitable Shavuot items are scattered semi-visibly all over the playing-field or room. The participants go out in search of these items, and collect as many as they can find. For each item collected the player gains 1 point. A number of items, e.g. figs or wheat, can be considered more "valuable," and for each one of these found, the player gains 5 points. The player with the most points wins the game.

THE SHAVUOT RITUAL IN THE TORAH

"I profess this day unto the Lord thy God, that I am come unto the country which the Lord gave unto our fathers for to give us ...And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God: A wandering Aramean was my father, he went down into Egypt and sojourned there with a few . . . And the Egyptians afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage; and when we cried unto the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voices . . . And he hath brought us into this place and hath given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now behold I have brought the first fruits of the land which Thou, O Lord, hast given me."

When he came to the words, "A wandering Aramean," he took, down the basket from his shoulder and held it by the rim. Then the priest put his hand beneath it and waved it and the man recited the words, from "A wandering Aramean" until he finished the passage. Then he left the basket by the side of the altar, bowed down and went on his way.

The rich brought their first fruits in baskets overlaid with silver and gold; while the poor brought them in wicker baskets made of peeled willow branches and the first fruits were given to the priests. (Mishna Bikkurim, 3)

AT MOUNT SINAI

And it came to pass on the third day the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace; and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, . . . And waxed louder and louder, Moses spake and God answered him by a voice. And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mount. And the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount, and Moses went up. (Exodus 19:16ff)

THE THREE PILGRIMAGES

“THREE times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the Feast of Unleavened bread, and in the Feast of Weeks, and in the Feast of Tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the Lord empty; every man shall give as he is able according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee” (Deuteronomy 16:16-17)

Once there was one who forgot to lock the doors of his house and went up to Jerusalem for the festival, and when he returned, he found a serpent knotted in the rings in his doors.

Another time there was one who forgot and failed to put his hens inside his house and went up for the festival, and when he returned he found destroyed cats lying before them.

Another time there was one who forgot and failed to put a bundle of wheat inside his house and went up for the festival and when he returned he found lions surrounding it to guard it.

Said Rabbi Pinchas: There were once two brothers in Ashkelon, whose neighbors were evil men from other nations. And they said: “These Jews go up to Jerusalem to pray, let us go in and take what is in their houses and destroy them.”

The time came and the brothers went up to Jerusalem. The Holy One, Blessed Be He, sent angels in their image to stay in their homes. When the brothers returned from Jerusalem, they distributed of the goods they had brought with them among all their neighbors. The neighbors said to them: “Where have you been?”

They answered: “In Jerusalem. “ “When did you go up?” “On such and such a day.” “And when did you come back?” “On such and such a day.” Then they said: “Blessed be the God of the Jews, who has not abandoned them and does not abandon them.”

Those men had calculated when the brothers were going up to pray in Jerusalem, so that they might rob them - and God sent angels in their image who stayed in their homes. (Shir Hashirim Raba, 7)

HARVEST

“AND THE feast of Harvest, the first fruits of thy labors, which thou hast sown in the field.” (Exodus 23: 16)

“When thou cut test down thine harvest in thy field and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless and for the widow; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.” (Deuteronomy 24: 19)

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem, in the beginning of barley-harvest.

And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz.

And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi: Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her: Go my daughter. And she went; and she came and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem; and he said unto the reapers: The Lord be with you. And they answered him: The Lord bless thee!

Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers: Whose damsel is this? And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said: It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab; and, she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves; so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.

Then said Boaz unto Ruth: Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens; let thine eyes be on the field that they reap, and go thou after them. Have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? And when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels and drink of that which the young men have drawn.

And when, she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying: Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not; and let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them that she may glean them, and rebuke her not. (Ruth I: 22; a: 1-9, 15-16)

BIKKURIM

And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave-offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete; even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat-offering unto the Lord. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave-loaves of two tenth parts; they shall be of fine flour; they shall be taken with leaven; they are the first fruits unto the Lord. (Leviticus) 23: 15-17)

And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein, that thou shalt take of the first of all fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name there. And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him: I profess this day unto the Lord thy God, that I am come unto the country which the Lord swore unto our fathers for to give us. And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the Lord thy God. And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God:

A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty and populous. And the Egyptians evil-entreated us and afflicted us and laid upon us hard bondage. And when we cried unto the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voice, and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression.

And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs and with wonders. And he hath brought thus into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first fruits of the land, which thou, O Lord, has given me.

And thou shalt set it before the Lord thy God, and worship before the Lord thy God. And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee and unto thine house; thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you. (Deuteronomy 26: 6-11)

How were the first fruits set apart? When a man goes down into his field and sees for the first time a ripe fig, or a ripe cluster of grapes, or a ripe pomegranate, he binds it with reed grass and says: "Lo! These are the first fruits;"

How were the first fruits brought to Jerusalem? The inhabitants of the smaller cities in their Maamad gathered together, in its chief town and spent the night in the open place.

Early in the morning, the Officer of the Maamad said to them "Arise and let us go to Zion, to the house of the Lord our God." Those who lived near to Jerusalem brought fresh figs and grapes, and those who lived far away brought dried figs and raisins. In front of them went an ox, with its horns overlaid with gold and a wreath of olive leaves on its head.

The flute played before them until they reached Jerusalem. They then sent messengers and decorated their first fruits. The rulers, the chief priests and the treasurers of the Temple went out to meet them and all the craftsmen of Jerusalem stood up and greeted them with the words, "Brethren, ye are welcome."

The flute was played until they reached the Temple mount when even Agrippa, the king would take his basket on his shoulder and enter into the Temple court. The Levites would then sing, "I will exalt Thee, O Lord, for Thou has raised me up and not made mine enemies to triumph over me."

Whilst the basket was on his shoulder, a man would recite the Biblical verses, from Deuteronomy, chapter 26:

"I profess this day unto the Lord thy God, that I am come unto the country which the Lord swore unto our fathers for to give US ...And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God: A wandering Aramean was my father, he went down into Egypt and sojourned there with a few . . . And the Egyptians afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage; and when we cried unto the Lord God of our fathers; the Lord heard our voice . . . And he hath brought us into this place and hath given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now behold I have brought the first fruits of the land which Thou, O Lord, hast given me!' When he came to the words, " A wandering Aramean," he took down the basket from his shoulder and held it by the rim. Then the priest put his hand beneath it and waved it and the man recited the words, from " A wandering Aramean"

until he finished the passage. Then he left the basket by the side of the altar, bowed down and went on his way.

The rich brought their first fruits in baskets overlaid with silver and gold, while the poor brought them in wicker baskets made of peeled willow branches and the first fruits were given to the priests. (Mishna Bikkurim, 3)

AT MOUNT SINAI

And it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud so that all the people that were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace; and the whole mount quaked greatly.

And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, And waxed louder and louder, Moses spake; and God answered him by a voice.

And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mount. And the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount, and Moses went up.

And the Lord said unto Moses: Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them, perish. And let the priests which come near 'to the Lord c sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them.

And Moses said unto the Lord: The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it.

And the Lord said unto him: Away, get thee, down; and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee; but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the Lord, lest he break forth upon them. So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them.

And all the people saw the thunderings and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses: Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.

And Moses said unto the people: Fear not; for God is come to prove you and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.

And the people stood afar off; , and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness, where God was.(Exodus, 19: 16-26; 20: 18-21)

The Lord regarded all the mountains and found no mountain so worthy as Mount Sinai that the Torah should be given on it and God's spirit rest on it. Why did Mount Sinai merit all this? Because it humbled itself: When it saw Mount Hermon and Mount Shirion quarrelling with each other, one saying "On me shall it (God's spirit) rest," the other saying, "No, but on me shall it rest," the Holy One Blessed Be He, saw its humility, and made His spirit to rest on it; (Midrash Aseret Hadibrot)

Rabbi Yitzchak said: When Israel went out of Egypt they were worthy that the Torah should be given them at once, except that the Holy One Blessed Be He said to them: "The glory of my sons has not yet come; they have come out from the enslavement

of clay and bricks, and cannot receive the Torah at once.” The matter can be likened to a king whose son recovered from an illness. His tutor said to him: ..Let your son go back to his school.” Said the king: “The glory of my son has not yet come back, and you say 'Let your son go back to his school.' Let my son rather recuperate for two or three months, in eating and drinking, and he will recover, and after-wards will he go to his school.” (Kohelet Raba, 3)

“And they encamped in the desert.” The Torah was given to Israel publicly in a place which belonged to no man. If it had been given in the land of Israel might have said. To the peoples of the earth: “You have no portion of the Torah.” And for this reason it was given publicly and in a place which belonged to no man. Thinkest thou perchance it was given in the night? No, for it is written: “And it was on the third day when the morning was risen.” Thinkest thou perchance it was given in silence? No, for it is written: “There was thunder and lightning.” Or thinkest thou perchance that these thunders were not heard? No, for it is written: “And all the people heard the crashing of the thunder . . . ”

When the Holy One, Blessed be He, pronounced the words “I am the Lord thy God”, the earth trembled, and all the kings of the earth ran to Balaam, the impious, to question him. But when they heard him say that God was about to give the Torah to his people, they all returned, each one to his place.

The peoples had been called together, that they might not say afterwards: “Had the Torah been offered to us, we should have accepted it.” For it was offered to them, and they refused it, as it is written: “The Lord appeared on Sinai, and He burned upon Seir for them: He showed himself upon the Mountain of Pharan, on His right a place of fire - for them.”

And He revealed himself first to the children of Esau, saying: “Will you also accept the Torah?” They asked Him: “What is written therein?” And he answered: “Thou shalt not kill!” Then they said: “We cannot accept the Torah, for the blessing of our father, his heritage, was: “By thy sword shalt thou live.”

Then God revealed himself to the Ammonites and the Moabite and He asked them: “Will you accept the Torah?” They asked Him: “What is written therein?” And when He replied, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” they answered: “How shall we accept it? Are we not all the issue of adultery?”

Then God revealed Himself to the children of Ishmael, saying: “Will you accept the Torah?” And they asked: “What is written there-in?” And when he answered: “Thou shalt not steal,” they replied, “How shall we accept it? Was not the blessing of our father: “He shall be a savage man, and his hand shall be against every man?” But when God came before the children of Israel, with the fire of the Torah on His right, they cried as with one voice: “All that the Lord hath said, we shall do and obey.” (Mechilta)

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi also said: “When Moses ascended: on high, the ministering angels spake before the Holy One, Blessed Be He, Sovereign of the Universe! What business has one born of woman amongst us?” “He has come to receive the Torah,” answered He to them. Said they to Him, “That secret treasure, which has been hidden to Thee for nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the world was created, Thou desirest to give to flesh and blood! What is man, that thou art mindful of

him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him? O Lord our God, How excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who has set thy glory (the Torah) upon the Heavens!

“Return them an answer,” bade the Holy One, blessed be He, to Moses. “Sovereign of the Universe,” replied he, “I fear lest they consume me with the [fiery] breath of their mouths.”

“Hold on to the Throne of Glory,” said He to him, “and return them an answer, as it is said, He maketh him to hold on the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud over him, whereon Rabbi Nachman observed: This teaches that the Almighty spread the lustre of His Shechinah and cast it as a protection over him. .He [then] spake before Him. “Sovereign of the Universe. The Torah which Thou givest me, what is; written therein?”

“I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the Lord of Egypt.” Said he to them [the angels], ‘Did ye go down to Egypt; were ye enslaved to Pharaoh: why then should the Torah be yours?’

Again, what is written therein? Thou shalt have none other gods: do ye dwell among peoples that engage in idol worship? Again what is written therein? Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy: do ye then perform work that ye need to rest? Again what is written therein? Thou shalt not take (tissa) the name . . .in vain: is there any business (massa) dealings among you? Again what is written therein, Honor thy father and thy mother: have ye fathers and mothers? Again what is written therein? Thou shalt not murder. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal, is there jealousy among you; is the Evil Tempter among you ?’ Straightway they conceded [right] to the Holy One, Blessed Be He, for it is said, O Lord, our Lord, How excellent is thy name, whereas Who hast set thy glory upon the heavens is not written. Immediately each one was moved to love him [Moses].” (Talmud Bavli --Shabbat, 88b)

Rabbi Meir said: When Israel stood before Mount Sinai, the Holy One Blessed be He said to them: “I vow, I will give you the Torah, but bring me trustworthy guarantors that you will guard it, and I will give it to you.” They said to Him: “Lord of the World, our forefathers will be our guarantors.”

The Holy One Blessed be He said to them: “I have complaints against your forefathers, but bring me trustworthy guarantors and I will give it to you.” They said to Him: “Lord of the World, our prophets will be our guarantors.” He said to them: “I have complaints against them, but bring me trust-worthy guarantors, and I will give it to you.” They said: “Behold our children are guarantors for us.” Said the Holy One Blessed be He: “These are certainly trustworthy guarantors -for them will I give you it.” (Shir Hashirim Raba)

Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Korcha says: “Moses' feet stood on the mountain and he wholly in the heavens, like a tent which is spread and men sit within it and their feet stand on the earth and they are wholly in the tent. Thus was it with Moses, his feet on the mountain and he wholly in the heavens, and he regarded all which was in the heavens, and the Holy One Blessed be He spoke to him like a mall which speaks with his comrade. The first Voice issued, and the heavens and earth reverberated with it and the seas and the rivers fled, the mountains and hills collapsed, and all the trees crumpled, and the dead in

the grave came to life and stood on their feet and all those which were yet to be created even until the end of all generations stood with them at Mount Sinai. And the people of Israel who were alive fell on their faces and died. Then issued a second Voice, and they live and stood on their feet and said to Moses our Teacher: 'We cannot hear the Voice of the Holy One Blessed be He, for we die.' The Holy One Blessed be He heard the voice of the people of Israel and reassured them.

He sent for the angels Michael and Gabriel and they grasped the arms of Moses against his will and brought him near to the mist and the rest of the words He spoke to Moses. Of this it is written: (As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him!!' (Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer, 41)

Rabbi Yehuda says: “When a person speaks with his comrade, he is seen and his voice is unseen; but [the people of] Israel heard the Voice of the Holy One Blessed Be He and saw the Voice issue from the Mouth of Might and the lightnings and the thunderings, as it is written, “And all the people saw the thunderings, and saw the lightning.”

Rabbi Pinchas says: “All that generation that heard the Voice of the Holy One Blessed Be He on Mount Sinai were privileged to a life like that of the angels, and all manner of vermin had no authority over them, and in their death worms had no authority over them -blessed were they in this world' and blessed in the world to come. And of them is it written: ‘Happy is that people, that is in such a case.’” (Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer, 41)

Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: “When the Holy One Blessed be He gave the Torah, not a bird twittered, not a bird fluttered, not an ox bellowed, angels flew not, the seraphim said not 'Holy', the sea moved not, human creatures spoke not; but the universe was quiet and still ; and the Voice issued forth: 'I am the Lord thy God!!' (Shemot Raba, 29)

AKDAMOT

He has eternal might, too great to be explained
 Were all the heavens parchments, and all the forests quills,
 If all the seas were ink., the rivers and the lakes,
 If all that dwell on earth were skilful scribes and writers.
 The glorious Lord of heaven and Ruler of the land
 Alone he built the world, and its foundations hid,
 Untiringly, untiringly, perfected it,
 And with the lightest letters, quite intangible,
 Completed all His work, and on the seventh day,
 His glorious light ascended on His Throne of Fire. (Akdamot, 5-14)

THE PEOPLE AND THE TORAH

“And the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Exodus 119, 8). Rabbi Elijah of Villa (“The Gaon”) said: This is what Israel replied to Moses: It is possible to do what the Lord hath spoken only when all of Israel are together, not when they are scattered among the nations.

KING AND RABBI

It was the sacred custom of Rabbi Levi-Yitzchak of Berditchev, who passionately defended the people of Israel to debate with God and point out the merits of His sons. Once, on the Festival of Shavuot, Rabbi Levi-Yitzchak rose to his feet and said: “Lord of the World, on Rosh Ha-Shanah you assumed the character of a King, the King of the Universe, and in justice You cannot over-look and forgive the sins of the people of Israel; for the law is written: “ A King may forego his honor, but his honor is not foregone.’ But today, the Time of The Giving of The Torah, You assume the character of a teacher and Rabbi, and You have it in Your power to forgive; for it is written: ‘A Rabbi may forego his honor, and his honor is fore-gone’.”

GIVING AND RECEIVING

Rabbi Yitzchak of Gur, the Chassdic sage, said: Why is Shavuot referred to as “The Time of the Giving of the Torah and not “The Time of the Receiving of the Torah”? Because the time of the giving of the Torah was only at Mount Sinai, whereas the time of the receiving of the Torah is everyday.

JEWES AND CONVERTS

Rabbi Shmuel of Fiorda was asked: "Let our Rabbi teach us, why do converts to Judaism and converts from Judaism exist? There are Jews who change their religion and become Gentiles a Gentiles who change their religion and become Jews."

"This is why," replied Rabbi Shmuel, "Tradition tells us that the Holy One, Blessed Be He, offered the Torah to all the nations and they failed to accept it, until He came to Israel and they accepted it, at first unwillingly and later willingly.

Do you think it possible that among all the nations who refused it there were no individuals who wanted to accept the Torah? And the six hundred thousand Israelites who said, "all that the Lord hath spoken we will do" - is it possible that there were not among them individuals who were not willing to accept the Torah? There were. It is these who in each generation return to their origins; these become Gentiles and those become Jews."

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

"And Moses went down from the mount unto the people" (Exodus 19, 14). "This teaches us that Moses did not turn to his own affairs but went from the Mount to the people" (Rashi). But what "affairs" did Moses have other than the study of the Torah? "Moses did not turn to his own affairs," teaches us that even to these "affairs" - the study of the Torah and the Will of God -Moses did not turn at a time when he was dealing with public matters.

Rabbi Yechezkiel of Kuzmir therefore said, that public matters done publicly are more important than the affairs of God done privately.

FESTIVALS AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

On the eighth day, you shall have a solemn assembly (Num. 29:35). The Holy One said to Israel: Rejoicing becomes you, appointed seasons become you, Festival days become you.

"You have increased for the nation..." (Isa. 26:15). When You multiply festival days for the nations of the world, they eat, drink and carouse, attend their theaters and circuses and provoke you with their [foul] utterances and [vile] deeds. But Israel is not like that. When you increase Festival days for Israel, they eat, drink and rejoice, but then attend synagogues and douses of study and augment the number of their prayers. (Yalkut, Pinhas #782)

In Tzipori, a heathen posed a question to R. Akiva: Why do you go on observing the appointed seasons? Did not the Holy One say to you, "Your New Moons and your appointed seasons My soul hates" (Isa. 1:14)? R. Akiva replied: Had the Holy One said "My New Moons and *your* appointed seasons," meaning the appointed seasons that Jeroboam son of Nebat instituted, of which Scripture says, "Jeroboam ordained a feast in

the eighth. . . even in the month which he had devised of his own heart” (1 Kings 12:32-33). But the appointed seasons you refer to will never cease, nor will the New Moons. Why not? Because they belong to the Holy One, as is said, “These are the appointed seasons of the Lord” (Lev. 23:4).

The appointed seasons were given to Israel for no other purpose than for them to enjoy themselves. The Holy One said: If you enjoy yourselves this year, you will do so again the following year, as is said, “When you keep this ordinance in its season, then from year to year” (Ex. 13:10) – you will be given the opportunity to do so from year to year (Tanhuma, Bereshit #4).

R. Isaac said: A man should purify himself for a Festival. (TB RH 16b)

We have been taught that R. Eliezer said: On a festival, a man is either to eat and drink or to sit and study. But R. Joshua said: divide the day – half for eating and drinking, and half for spending it in the house of study. R. Yohanan noted: Both deduce it from the same verses. One verse says, “A solemn assembly to the Lord your God” (Dt. 16:8) while another says “You shall have a solemn assembly (Num 29:35). How so? R. Eliezer took the two verses to mean: “Either entirely to God or entirely to yourselves” while R. Joshua took them to mean: “Divide the day – half to God and half to yourselves” (TB Pes. 68b; Betza 15b).

R. Isaac said: Where is the proof that during a Festival a man should go calling on his master? The verse, “Wherefore will you go [to the man of God] today? It is neither Rosh Hodesh nor Festival” (2 Ki 4:23).

Our Masters taught: It once happened that R. Ilai went calling on his master R. Eliezer in Lydda just before a Festival. R. Eliezer said, “Ilai, you do not seem to be among those who rest on a Festival.” For R. Eliezer used to say, “I praise the indolent who do not go out of their houses during a Festival, in keeping ‘You shall rejoice in your Festival, you, together with your son, together with your daughter....’” (Dt. 16:14). (TB Suk 27b)/

HERETICS

One should not engage in give and take with heretics, nor should one receive medical treatment from heretics, even to prolong life by ever so little.

It once happened to Ben Dama, the son of R. Ishmael’s sister that he was bitten by a snake. Jacob of Kefar Sekhania came to heal him, but R. Ishmael would not allow him to do so. Ben Dama pleaded, “Ishmael, my uncle, allow me to be healed by him – I will cite proof from the Torah that he is permitted to do so.” He had not even finished speaking when his soul departed, just as he uttered the word “permitted.” And he died. “Happy are you Ben Dama that your body is pure, that your soul has left you while you were in a state of purity, and that you have not disregarded the words of your colleagues, who quote, ‘he who breaks through a fence, a serpent shall bite him’” (Eccles. 10:8). (TB AZ 27b) (Jacob is probably James of Alphaeus - Mark 3:18, or James the Younger - Mark 15:40)

The Evangels and the books of the heretics are not to be saved from a fire [on a Sabbath]. R. Yose the Galilean said: When I find the books of heretics, I cut out the divine Names written in them, hide those, and burn the rest. R. Tarfon said: May I bury my sons if, when books of heretics come into my hands, I do not bury them together with the divine Names in them! Fore even if a man pursued me to slay me and serpent were after me to bite me, I would seek refuge in a heathen temple rather than in the houses of heretics, since idolaters do not know the Holy One, blessed be He, and so deny Him, whereas those heretics know Him and still deny Him. . . . And just as we are not to save them from a fire, so we are not to save them from under a collapsed house, from water, or from anything else that may destroy them. (TB Shab. 116a; TP Shab 16:1, 15c)

When Hananiah the of R. Joshua's brother went to Capernaum, the heretics worked a spell on him and caused him to go into town riding his donkey on the Sabbath. His uncle Joshua visited him and gave him an ointment, and the spell was removed. He said to him: Since the donkey of that wicked person is now roused against you, you should not continue living in the Land of Israel. So he went down to Babylonia where he died in peace.(Eccl. R. 1:8 #4)

Rabbi Judah ben ben Nakosah had dealings with the heretics. They kept asking him questions, which he kept answering. They continued goading him with questions, which he answered. Finally he said to them: We argue to no purpose. Come, let us agree between ourselves that he who prevails may hit the opponent's head with a mallet. He kept prevailing and kept hitting them until their heads were covered with bruises.

When he returned, his disciples said to him: Master, he were helpted by Heaven and you prevailed. He replied: To no purpose! Go and prayer for me, and also for this bag [passing as my head], which once was filled with precious stones and pearls, and now is filled with burned out coals. (Eccl R. 1:8 #4)